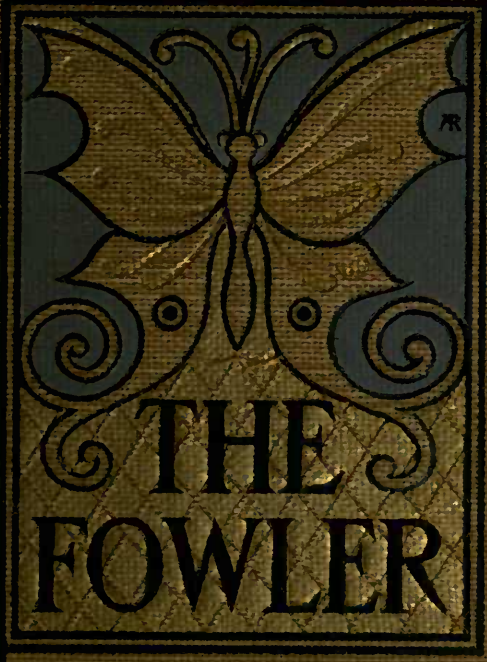

BY

BEATRICE
HARRADEN

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From
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THE FOWLER

THE FOWLER

"Our Soul is escaped even as a Bird out of the Snare of the Fowler"

BY

BEATRICE HARRADEN

Author of

"SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT," "IN VARYING MOODS,"
"HILDA STRAFFORD," ETC.

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THE FOWLER

Part I

CHAPTER I

A VISITOR TO THE CASTLE

It was about eleven o'clock on a summer morning when a little man of rather eccentric appearance crossed the moat of Graystoke Castle, and finding a bell hanging outside the quaint old gate-house, pulled it violently. No one answered. He rang once more, and still could not gain admittance.

"It is a relief to find that no one is living at high pressure here," he said. "I will smoke a cigarette, and wait patiently."

He lit a cigarette and leaned against the fence. He was unusually short and slight of stature; thin-drawn lips, clean-shaven face, and double eye-glasses attached to broad black ribbon were his other characteristics. He might equally well have been taken for a young boy or a little old man, until you looked into his face and knew that he could never have been young — that he was probably born at the age of thirty-six, and had remained there ever since.

He threw away the end of his cigarette, and pulled the bell again, this time with undue violence. Then a bolt was drawn, and the old gate swung slowly back, and a woman stepped forward. She seemed vexed at being disturbed.

"What a noise you made with the bell!" she said. "You nearly frightened me out of my wits."

"I wished to frighten you into them," he said, quietly. "I have been waiting here more than twenty minutes. However, I do not make a complaint, but merely a statement. If you have no objection, I should like to see the Castle. I came for that purpose, and it would be satisfactory to carry out my intentions."

The woman looked at him and took an instinctive dislike to him, and, wishing to be well rid of him, determined to ask her lodger to show him over the Castle. She left him standing in the courtyard whilst she tapped at Nora Penhurst's door.

"Miss Penhurst," she said plaintively, "there be some one wanting to see the Castle, and I'm in the midst of churning."

"Then of course you must not be disturbed," said Nora Penhurst, smiling; and she threw aside the book which she was reading, and glanced at the tiny mirror.

And then she stepped out into the courtyard, brandishing in her hand the key of the Castle. She had a gallant appearance and a noble bearing: health and happiness and strength had claimed her for their own.

The stranger glanced at her with some curiosity.

"You are the custodian?" he asked, a little doubtfully.

"I am only the deputy custodian," she answered, "but we all have to make a beginning;" and without further comment, she led him across the spacious courtyard and unlocked the great door of the dining-hall. She seemed to know her subject well, and had made herself familiar with the history as well as the archæology of the Castle, which had been the home of one of those lords of the Marches in Edward the First's reign.

It was an almost unique specimen of a mansion of the thirteenth century, built originally for domestic life, and fortified afterwards; so that it could tell a tale of peaceful daily life and of troubled times of foray and bloodshed.

The stranger listened to all she had to say, and appeared to be greatly interested; but now and again he smiled cynically, as though he doubted the deputy custodian's statements; and he asked so many pressing questions that it was evident he wished to probe her knowledge to its utmost quick. Nora Penhurst bore with him for some time, granting him that kind of sublime indulgence which a lion would show to a mouse. For every question she had her answer, and when he tried to trip her up, and make her contradict herself, she utterly refused to fall into the pit. At last he became intolerable over some detail about the tracery of the windows of the withdrawing-room, and Nora lost her patience.

"Little wretch," she thought, as she looked down at him from her heights, "you are not going to snub the deputy custodian, I can tell you!" Then she said aloud:

"Of course I merely quote from the guide-book. And the guide-book merely quotes from Britton's 'Architectural Antiquities.' Other authorities are mentioned in the pamphlet published by the vicar of this parish. I believe he has given about twenty-five years of study to the subject. But no doubt you can come and put us all right."

The stranger bit his lip, and then answered frankly:

"Most people think they can do that, especially if they have not studied the subject. Only I did not really mean to doubt your statements. It is the old

story of my abominable manner: a trouble which pursues me everywhere."

"How very sad for you!" said the deputy custodian, with a gravity mingled with sarcasm which did not escape the notice of the visitor to the Castle. "But come now," she added, genially, "you must see the frescoes on the walls of the dining-hall. They are very interesting. You will find an account of them on page 8 of the guide-book, or else you can ask the custodian to enlighten you. She is rather busy with churning to-day, but no doubt, if you persuade her, she will give you the benefit of her eloquence."

"I prefer to trust to page 8 of the guide-book," said the stranger, "or to your own generosity."

Nora Penhurst relented, and without any reluctance she pointed out the faint traces of the frescoes and related the history of them; and then she took the stranger up into the musicians' gallery, where, in the old days, pleasing harmonies were made for the banqueters below; and after that, she led him through a narrow passage and up a steep flight of steps until she reached the priests' rooms, where she showed him the views from the windows.

"To my mind," she said, enthusiastically, "that is the most beautiful part of all. I remember when I went to Warwick Castle, my greatest pleasure was in looking out of the windows on to the Avon, and in seeing those splendid old cedars. And so here, although I admire every stone of this dear old place, I like best to look at Nature framed in these picturesque windows. I have spent many happy hours in these rooms."

"Nature has never interested me greatly," he remarked. "Human nature, yes: there indeed you have a rare field for observation and conjecture, and—"

He stopped suddenly, for there she was standing in the sunshine, a charming, fair presence, and, for the life of him, he did not know how to catalogue her. He prided himself on his quick and subtle use of the mental microscope, but this time, the specimen for analysis could not be finished off in a mere moment. Who was she? and what was she doing in the gate-house of the old Castle?

"But I have kept you a long time," he added, taking off his eye-glasses and readjusting them deliberately; "and I have already taxed your forbearance. So now I wish you good morning. Will you receive the money for my admission? Thanks, I do not require any change. It can be divided between the custodian — and the deputy custodian."

Nora stared at him, and said scornfully:

"For whom do you take me?"

"I understood you were the deputy custodian," he remarked, quietly. "I am sorry if I have made a mistake."

Then he opened the gate and crossed the drawbridge, whilst Nora stood lost in amazement.

"What a little wretch! How dared he!"

But she was one of those happy people who have a true sense of humour, and before another minute was over, she was laughing heartily over the incident.

CHAPTER II

THE DEPUTY CUSTODIAN

NORA PENHURST was one of those who seem to stroll through life carrying everything before them, but carrying it gallantly and unaggressively. At school she had always borne off the prizes, whether for sewing or learning; she was not specially diligent, but she was specially gifted. She never cared for her success, nor did she appear to be conscious of it; and she was very much loved. The little ones came to her for help, and felt that her laurels had not put a barrier between herself and them. And that is very rare. She had a wonderful way of stating things simply, and a truly regal way of sweeping away difficulties. When she passed on to a High School, history repeated itself there. All honours fell to her, and she wore them with that easy grace granted only to the few. And again no one grudged her these laurels, so quietly won and so modestly borne. They called her "the girl with stripes and stars," and were as proud of her as generous-hearted English girls know how to be. Even when she gained the Beresford Scholarship for Grantham College there was no ill-will felt. Amy Birch, who was just as clever as Nora, but had not the nerve and health which are, after all, the best qualifications for success in examinations — even she did not grudge Nora her success.

"Dear old Nora!" she said, through her tears of disappointment, "if any one else but you had got it, I should have hated her. But with you it is different.

Failure is not meant for you, and no one wants it for you."

"I am so sorry," Nora said, half crying. "It does seem a horrid shame. And you know you are much cleverer than I am; but I am so strong, and examinations do not appal me. You have been working too hard and fretting too much, and you are overwrought, whereas I have never felt better in my life."

"You look your dear, splendid self," said Amy Birch, drying her tears; "and I think the only thing to be done now is to get leave to go out by ourselves and have an ice!"

And history repeated itself at Grantham. Nora was there for three years, and at the end of that time was bracketed equal with the first on the list in the Classical Tripos. All her comrades rejoiced in her success, although she had worked far more leisurely than they themselves. She had given plenty of time to bicycling and golf and dressmaking. She was very particular about her appearance, and could not bear to wear anything dowdy. The afternoon before her Tripos, her friends found her finishing off a new dress.

"Yes, my dears," she said in her light-hearted way, "I dare say you think me very frivolous; but both father and I agreed that I could not possibly tackle those Greek papers in an old frock. I should have been thinking of that frock the whole time. In this lovely gown my mind will be free for the Greek!"

She was very merry, and had an unusual sense of fun. It was not academic, and some of the more sober-tempered students thought it out of place; but it was very human, and scholars are at last learning to know that scholarship and humanity have something in common. That is a wonderful discovery — that a man or a woman

can be a scholar, and yet be a true human being. We shall one day hear of a philosopher becoming a human being; and after that, anything is possible!

Nora was human in another respect, too; she was fond of men.

"Plato and Aristotle and Æschylus are all very well in their way," she said; "but I do like to see some of my undergraduate friends."

So on visiting days she received these young men in the general reception-room; and, judging from the fun and light-heartedness, the conversation was not always strictly classical.

"Now I am ready for any amount of work," she would say after a spell of fun. "I feel braced up for those old gentlemen of the past."

Then she would shut herself up in her study, and accomplish in a few hours what others mastered with difficulty in several days.

At last her college days were ended. She had gone to Grantham with honours, and with honours she left, and at once obtained work as a classical teacher in two or three of the High Schools of London, and lived at home with her father in St George's Square, Primrose Hill. She was extremely happy in her home-life, and had a beautiful friendship with her old father, who had been everything to her all her life — father, mother, playfellow, and faithful chum. She was successful as a teacher, partly because there was nothing of dry bones about her scholarship, and partly because she had a wonderful way, quite her own, of imparting knowledge to her pupils. It was just as though she took people up in her strong arms and said, "Here, I 'll carry you any distance. It is no trouble to me." Her pupils all knew that she was a distinguished scholar, and they admired and respected

her; but, for all that, it was her humanity that won and held them — and she belonged to them all equally, to the idle and the eager, the stupid and the clever. She dressed well for them too, and would no sooner have thought of putting on a dowdy frock for her Latin prose lesson, than of wearing an unbecoming dress at a dance. Girls appreciate this kind of attention, and Nora's pupils boasted a good deal about the delightful appearance of their classical mistress. She was known to have a wholesome influence over all the girls with whom she came in contact, and being thus happy and successful in her professional work, things had gone very well with her. Failure indeed, had not come near her, and sometimes her father, Roger Penhurst, used to shake his head and think that she was a little too self-confident at times, and that perhaps she needed to make the acquaintance of some kind of adversity. Then he would dismiss such thoughts from his mind, and be astonished at himself for desiring any such experience for his belovèd Nora.

"What an old fool I am to wish to anticipate the inevitable!" he would say. "Life will bring its own lessons in its own good time."

So the years had passed by, fraught with duties easily performed and pleasures perhaps too easily won, and to-day Nora was sitting in the garden of the old Castle, leaning back in an easy-chair, and dividing her attention between examination papers and afternoon tea. The Castle collie, Carlo, lay at her feet; the black cat sat blinking at her; the hens and chickens came creeping round cautiously, pecked at the crumbs, and retreated. Nora was dressed in a plain black skirt and a soft shot-silk blouse. She wore no hat, and the sunlight played with her brown hair. She was fair of complexion. There was nothing specially remarkable about her fea-

tures, but a lovely expression of frankness lingered in her eyes and around her mouth. It was that which was the secret of her beauty — that and her gallant bearing. She looked like a ship in full sail, riding confidently over the waves, strong in build and buoyant in possibilities.

But she was sleepy, and, having yawned several times over those examination papers, she pushed them impatiently from her, fell a-thinking, and dozed. Strangely enough, she recalled what her old father had once said to her about failure, and then, without any rhyme or reason, she suddenly began to dream of the little stranger who had visited the Castle yesterday. When she awoke, she remembered her dream.

"I rather wish I could have seen him again," she said to herself; "at least he is different from other people, and behaves in an unexpected manner. I certainly never thought he would make me a present of threepence, and yet it was so neatly done, too, as a bit of revenge for my refusing to be annihilated by him. I should like to see him again, if only to tell him that people like himself cannot annihilate people like me."

Then she looked up, and there he stood before her, as though in answer to her reverie.

"Well," she said, smiling somewhat sleepily.

"Well," he answered.

Without any further remark he sat down on the bench, and glanced at the tea-table. There was nothing intrusive about his manner; he seemed for the moment like a child who is sure of being kindly treated, and simply comes in a natural way to claim such kindness. This was the impression produced on Nora. She rose leisurely, and carried the teapot into the kitchen of the gate-house, and returned with a clean cup and a fresh brew of tea.

"Thank you," he said, and he at once helped himself, and took no further notice of his hostess, who sank back into her chair, mystified and amused.

"I wonder if he thinks this is a tea-garden," she said to herself. "It would be interesting to know."

She turned once more to her examination papers, tied the corrected ones into a bundle, and waited quietly for further developments, glancing now and again at her mysterious companion, who sat there, apparently quite at ease, and oblivious of her presence. The situation was too much for Nora's gravity. Her mouth twitched several times, and finally she laughed aloud.

"You seem merry," he said, looking up.

"Thanks, I enjoy pretty good spirits," she answered, brightly.

"In spite of an afternoon's hard work?" he said, glancing at her papers piled up before her.

"Probably because of it," she replied, genially; "for when you have corrected fifty-three essays on Ambition, and have only forty-seven left, you may well feel in good spirits."

She at once regretted this reference to her own work, but he did not seem to have noticed her remark.

"Every day," he said, after a pause, as though he were continuing some conversation which had gone before, "life becomes more complicated, and the questions which we have thrust from us for so long now force themselves upon us with irresistible violence. We are startled out of our lethargy; we begin to think for ourselves, and act for ourselves. We are no longer frightened by time-honoured traditions; we are no longer held back by the limits placed by the absurd previous generations. I sometimes wish I were a woman, if only for the sake of experiencing the sensa-

tions of satisfaction which seem to possess her when she sees the waves of possibilities rolling to her feet. It must be thrilling!"

Nora raised her head from her examination papers.

"It is thrilling," she said in her strong, rich voice.

The little stranger relapsed into silence, and helped himself to another slice of bread-and-butter, and threw some crumbs to the fowls. It is possible that he was expecting his companion to make some further remark, but she gave no outward signs of wishing to enter into conversation, though he knew from her bright glance that she had plenty to say for herself if she chose to begin, but that she probably would not say one word unless she felt so inclined. The point was to make her feel inclined; and he turned many subjects over in his mind, not subjects in which he himself was particularly interested, but which he knew were of immense importance to many of the thinking public, especially to those who considered themselves modern. He himself was neither ancient nor modern nor mediæval, but instinct told him that Nora was modern, not of the type usually seen in so-called up-to-date drawing-rooms, and sometimes written about in up-to-date novels, but fundamentally modern for all that, with new tendencies, new ideals, and new necessities. He had felt yesterday that he wished to know something about her; now he was determined to know a great deal about her. He looked at her, and knew that she was strong and self-reliant; and he had already felt the force of her quiet sarcasm on the previous day, and he saw, from the amused expression now lingering about her mouth, that she had some sense of fun, and that she was probably commenting silently and humorously on his coolness in thus intruding upon

her solitude, with no attempt at excuse or apology. He knew all this, and he enjoyed the situation immensely.

"This is indeed a rare resting spot," he said, presently, looking at the old Castle and the quaint gate-house, and the sweep of the country in the distance, and the river glistening in the sunshine. "That is one of the things which we do not understand sufficiently well in these days, — to know how to rest and not to bore ourselves."

"And yet it is the people who know how to rest who do continuous good work," said Nora.

"Wonderful things have been said and done by restless souls," he answered.

"And still more wonderful things have been said and done by them when circumstances have conspired together to enforce rest upon them," Nora replied.

"Then you believe in the Gospel of Rest?" he asked.

"Absolutely," she answered, "and if I had the money and wished to be philanthropic, I should start a House of Rest for Tired Humanity. But I have not any money, and I have n't any desire to be philanthropic."

"It would be an experience," he said.

"Experience is n't everything," she answered.

"It is everything," he replied. "And I think no one should be frightened of experiences, no matter what they are, no matter how unhappy or how happy. Regarded from that point of view, life may be regarded as altogether satisfactory. There is no question then about life being a burden; we are caught up on wings, and have to carry no burdens. You, like the rest of us, must have often felt the burden of living."

"I cannot say that I have ever known much about the burden of living," Nora said, "though I have heard

these mysterious words used frequently by my friends. I have always put them in the same category as those mystic phrases of the Theosophists. My dearest friend, who, during the last epidemic of women's books, wrote one of the most miserable and most successful, was always talking about the 'burden of living.' I must say, however, that since the success of her book, her spirits have considerably improved: but I believe it is a known fact that six editions have a wonderful effect on nervous depression, altering one's whole way of looking at existence. I never thought much of the book until I saw what good it had done her. We went away for a week together last Easter, and she fairly surprised me by her frivolity. I cannot imagine what will become of her if she writes another book as dismal and successful as the last. She is in Sweden at present, amongst a little group of Ibsen friends; and, thanks to your present of threepence yesterday, I was able to write her a letter which I am going to take to the post-office in a few moments."

He smiled almost imperceptibly, and there came another pause. Then he said:

"You are lucky not to be feeling weighed down like most of us, and still luckier in being spared the necessity of writing a depressing book to improve your animal spirits. Things must certainly have gone very easily for you."

"Yes, they have," said Nora, eagerly. "To begin with, I have had the happiest home life that ever fell to the share of mortal maid. I have the most splendid old father, quite different from anybody else's father, I am thankful to say, and I have inherited from him an appreciation of life, and a genius for enjoying myself and finding pleasure in everything, even in the mere fact that I live and am strong, and can work and play to my

heart's content, without any effort, without any restraint. I have enjoyed myself with people, and with books, and with myself. The city is mine, and the country is mine too. The best musicians have played for me; the best actors have acted for me; the best painters have painted for me: in the country the birds have sung for me, the heather has bloomed for me, and for my sake, the gorse has taken unto itself a still more golden hue. I have been up at daybreak enjoying the early freshness of the morning, breathing in contentment and happiness; I have wandered in the woods and bathed myself in the greenness of the trees, and I have stretched myself on the ground and tried to make the birds and squirrels believe that I was really part and parcel of the woods; I have learned how to call the birds—" She stopped. "But I have no right to trouble you with a list of my pleasures and accomplishments," she added.

The little stranger seemed lost in thought, and then he said:

"Surely, surely you are an anachronism."

"I have always thought," continued Nora, more to herself than to him, "that there was only one thing which could break my spirit and wound me beyond all healing: to live on and yet not to care for life — to live on and be listless, taking no interest in one's surroundings, having no part in one's rich inheritance of appreciation for all things beautiful in nature and art and human companionship, and everything, in fact, that life has to offer. I could bear any deprivation, any grief, except that grief; for indifference means paralysis of the soul, and I should dread that illness beyond any other."

"Then it follows, as a matter of course," her companion said slowly, "that this is the illness which will certainly come to you in the fulness of time. It comes

to most of us: some of us recover, and others of us never recover. Which will you do, I wonder?"

"It shall never come to me," she answered, almost savagely, and she rose from her chair and looked down at him with fierce determination.

"Ah, do not boast," he replied, smiling, as he too rose. "And when it comes, treat it merely as an experience. Then you will be caught up on wings."

CHAPTER III

AT THE KING'S HEAD

It was an open secret in Graystoke that the Punchbowl was courting the King's Head. The Punchbowl did not do things in a hurry, but that was the way in Graystoke, and what a happy contrast with the undignified haste of the rest of the world. The King's Head did not give unqualified encouragement. There were several objections to the Punchbowl: the position of the inn was bleak and lonely, whereas the King's Head nestled cosily in a sheltered quarter of the village. Still, there was something to say for the Punchbowl, and there was a great deal to say for Mr William Parrington. And then, even in the bustle of a busy life, Mrs Mary Shaw was lonely; though she still rejoiced in a great-uncle, a great-great-aunt, a father, and a son. Her son was a good little lad, but she had a firm conviction that he would grow up to be a bad man, following the example of his father, who had deserted his wife more than twelve years ago.

"Ah, Wullie is a good lad," Mrs Mary Shaw would say with a sigh, "and to think that he 'll grow up to be a bad man! He has his father's own face, and the same terrible pleasant way about him. There 's no escaping being your father's own son."

These remarks were generally made in Wullie's presence, and he always laughed. Mrs Shaw laughed too, for she was a cheery soul, and took things very much as they came. Life had not been easy for the landlady

of the King's Head, but she had made something merry out of it for herself and others, stretching out her hands to help every one and everything. She must have had an excellent nervous system, for the grumblings of her three generations of "ancestors" never gave her one moment's irritation. "Great-great-aunts, great-uncles, and fathers always grumble," she said. "It be something for them to do, bless 'em, and I don't see why they should not enjoy themselves: folks must have an occupation." The dogs in the village were rather exacting; indeed Ship, the blacksmith's collie, had almost taken up his quarters at the King's Head, and lay full length before the entrance, angry if any one dared to disturb him. Mrs Shaw did not allow him to be interfered with.

"That's his way," she said. "People can't be broke of their habits." The carpenter's cock too was very demanding. He strutted up and down, and crowed loudly when any one came to the inn, so that Mrs Shaw said he was as handy as a front-bell. But in return for this service he expected to have refreshments at least every hour; and if no one attended to him, he sneaked into the kitchen and grabbed at what he could find, very much like the rest of humanity.

"That's his way," Mrs Shaw said, with her usual good-humour.

The children were always lying in wait for cakes and "fat-rascals," and other local dainties; and their persistence would have tried the patience of most people. But Mrs Shaw said:

"That's their way, bless 'em. It's natural enough."

She seemed, indeed, to have an almost sublime respect and indulgence for every kind of human characteristic; and there was no bitterness even in her memory of her husband, who had left her so cruelly a few months after her

marriage. In fact it was said by David the blacksmith that if any one had dared to criticise Mary Shaw's husband in her presence, she would have answered as usual:

"Ah well, that was just his way — poor creature!"

But for all her cheery manner of looking at life, and in spite of the immense comfort of having three generations of ancestors, and one descendant who in a few years would be sure to turn out badly, and in spite too of being the hostess of the King's Head, where, during some part of the year, a brisk business was done, and where even the teetotallers came to drink an occasional glass of port: in spite of all these advantages, Mrs Mary Shaw often felt lonely, and sometimes retreated into the arm-chair and threw her apron over her face, which was her mode of expressing weariness of the flesh and spirit, combined with a subtle realisation of the vanity of everything human and the uselessness of going on day after day striving — and for what?

It was on one of these occasions, when Mrs Mary Shaw had been resting in the arm-chair, covering her face with her apron, that Mr William Parrington strolled quietly into the kitchen and took possession of the other arm-chair. Mrs. Shaw thought she was alone, and continued her meditations beneath the apron. Mr Parrington at length coughed. The apron dropped, and discovered Mrs Shaw's winning face, which bore suspicious traces of tears.

"Well, I never!" said Parrington. "Is business bad?"

"Never was better," said the hostess of the King's Head, somewhat proudly.

"Has Wullie turned out a rascal already?" asked the host of the Punchbowl.

"No, he's a good lad so far," said Mrs Shaw, smiling.

"Is the last brewing a failure?" asked Parrington.

"I never make no failures," said Mrs Shaw, scornfully.

"Then what's the matter with you?" he persisted.

"I was just thinking of life," said Mrs Shaw, pensively. "That 's all."

"That was what I was thinking of yesterday," said Parrington.

Then there was silence between them for a few minutes, and the host of the Punchbowl drew his chair a little nearer to Mrs Mary Shaw.

"As the years go on," he said, "people get rather lonely, I'm beginning to think. I m lonely enough over there in the Punchbowl."

"I don't wonder. It 's not a situation as I cares anything about," said the hostess of the King's Head, brightening up again. "It catches them east winds something dreadful."

"Is that all you have against the Punchbowl?" asked Parrington.

"That's all I can think of at this moment," answered Mrs Shaw, pretending to shiver.

"Very much obliged," replied Parrington. Then he added quaintly, "Have you got anything against me, Mrs Mary Shaw?"

"No, Mr. Parrington," she answered, her face now wreathed in smiles.

"There's no east wind set in against me?"

"None," she answered, laughing.

"Well," he said.

"Well?" she asked, though she knew perfectly what was coming.

"Well," he continued, "if I was you, I should get married again, and I should marry Parrington. You might do better and you might do worse. Just you think it over. When you feel tired, and settle down for a little quiet

thinking, you just turn the matter over in your mind. Parrington will take care of you."

Mrs Mary Shaw looked up at Mr Parrington's kind face, and there were two tears of gratitude in her eyes. She herself took care of every one, and it was a new language to her to hear that some one was going to take care of her.

"But then there be all the ancestors, Parrington," she said, reluctantly.

"I'm not afraid of all the ancestors as ever you or me had or was likely to have," said Parrington, decisively.

"And then there be Wullie," she said. "He's as good a lad as ever breathed — bless him; but of course he'll be a terrible trouble yet, and how would you like that?"

"Wullie won't be no trouble to no one," said Parrington. "I'm not afraid of Wullie. There is only one thing I am afraid of."

"And what is that?" she asked.

"Losing you," he answered; and without another word he hastened away, leaving the hostess of the King's Head gazing into the fire and smiling, for she had always liked William Parrington, and though he had his one great weakness of considering his own inn superior to hers (which was obviously ridiculous), yet she knew that he had compensating excellences, combined with a distinguished appearance and a handsome grey beard. He had always been kind to her and good to Wullie; and David the blacksmith declared that he believed Parrington had been waiting for Mary Shaw these many years, until by lapse of time she should be free to marry again.

She was very pensive after Parrington's proposal, and looked with great anxiety at her ancestors, and still greater anxiety at Wullie.

Then one day she took counsel of Wullie whilst he was cutting wood for her. He was devotedly attached

to her, and thought her the most wonderful person that ever lived, and he understood all her fun, and shared all her worry when the ancestors quarrelled and grumbled beyond a reasonable limit.

"Wullie," she said, "would you have Parrington if you was me?"

"That I should," said Wullie, emphatically.

"You would n't be much of a trouble to him?" asked Mrs Shaw.

"Not till I be growed up," said Wullie, who was steeped in the traditions of the family.

Then one day she gave a few hints to her great-uncle, who sat on the front bench smoking a long clay pipe.

"Great-uncle," she said, "what would you think if I married again?"

Great-uncle was reading the Bible at the time, but he put it down and said:

"I should think you was a damned fool, Mary. That 's what I should think. And who 'd there be to make my porridge, I 'd like to know?"

Great-uncle seemed to think that settled the matter, and returned to his long clay pipe and his Bible.

The same day she said to her great-great-aunt, little Miss Renaldson, who looked exactly like a shrivelled-up cucumber:

"Aunt Rebeccah Renaldson, what would you say if I married again?"

Aunt Rebeccah put down her knitting, and took off her horn spectacles.

"I shouldn't say nothing, Mary Shaw," she answered, with true ancestral gravity, "for I should never speak to you no more. And where 'd you be then?"

"Where I am now, I expect," answered Mrs Mary Shaw.

"It can't be done," continued the great-great-aunt, shaking her head. "And besides, who 'd there be to wash and dress me, and put me to bed, I'd like to know? Folk can't always be thinking of themselves. We aren't put in this world to think of ourselves. You just remember that, Mary Shaw."

"She don't let me forget it," thought Mrs Shaw. "But there now, it 's her way!"

After this the hostess of the King's Head took no further counsel from her relations, but turned the matter over in her own mind, now deciding in favour of Parrington's proposal, and now dismissing every idea of a second marriage. Parrington could never bring her to the point, and often when he thought he had really conquered all her misgivings, she would say mischievously:

"No, Parrington; it be of no use. I can't abide them east winds."

Then Parrington would leave her angrily and not come to the King's Head for a few days, and during that time she would go about singing like a lark and full of fun and merriment, until the end of the fourth day, when she would sit quietly in the arm-chair, her apron over her head, and Wullie would whisper sympathetically, "Mother, shall I tell Parrington to come?" Then she would laugh and give Wullie a hug, telling him not to dare to tease her. "As if I cared for the horrid man," she would say, recklessly: "fifty year old and bald too!" But to-day, when Wullie came back from school, he found his mother sitting quietly in the arm-chair, with her apron over her head — a sure sign, as he knew, of extreme mental distress; and she would not be coaxed into any fun, and she did not hug him as usual and tell him that he was becoming a terrible bad boy. She just sat there quietly, concealing her kindly features,

and even allowing the bread in the oven to take its chance.

Wullie stood looking puzzled, and realised that things had indeed come to a crisis.

"I'll go and find Mr. Parrington," he said to himself; "that'll bring mother round."

As he was departing on this errand he met Nora, coming along towards the King's Head, in company with their little lodger, to whom his mother had taken a great dislike.

"Well, Wullie," Nora said, smiling at him kindly, "and how is your mother?"

"Oh, Miss Nora," he said, "she be awful down in the dumps to-day, and there she be sitting with her apron over her head."

Then Wullie glanced at her companion, whom he also disliked, and he drew a little nearer to Nora's side. Nora noticed the movement, and wondered whether the stranger was conscious of the boy's shrinking, but he appeared not to have even noticed his presence.

"I'll come in and cheer up your mother, Wullie, my lad," she said. And the boy ran off gladly. Then she turned to the little stranger and said:

"All the same, you will never be able to persuade me that acts of courage are prompted by feelings of bounce. . . ."

He smiled deprecatingly, and passed into the inn and upstairs to his sitting-room.

Nora paused for one moment on the threshold, and many conflicting thoughts about him came into her mind; but the last thought was relief at being free from him, and she gave herself a mental shake, and went into the kitchen of the King's Head, where she was always a welcome visitor. She had known Mrs Mary Shaw for

several years now, and felt herself almost to be part of the village community. Mrs Mary Shaw, on her part, believed that there was no one in the world like Miss Nora, or Miss Nora's dear old father.

"There ain't another person like him in the world to my thinking," she would say to Nora; "and I am sure I ought to know, seeing what experience I do have with ancestors and suchlike people."

This sentiment alone was a great bond between Nora and herself, but Mrs Mary Shaw was fond of her for her own sake too, and always cheered up when Nora's gallant figure strolled into the quaint old kitchen of the King's Head.

"Why, what 's the matter to-day, Mrs Mary? " asked Nora, brightly. "What has gone wrong? Has n't Parrington been to see you? "

The apron came down from the face at once.

"Oh, there 's nothing much the matter with me, dear Miss Nora," said Mrs Mary, smiling dejectedly, "only I was that horrid the last time Parrington was here, and the nasty man has been and kept away five days, one more day than usual. Not that I miss him, and yet I do! And I feel as if I did n't know what to say about marrying him. Tiresome man — always bothering me! And now keeping away one day longer. Not that I want him, dear Miss Nora! No, I don't want him. Still — would you marry him if you was me? I can't say as I 'm *not* fond of Parrington sometimes. He 's got pleasant ways about him, to be sure, and a particular handsome beard, but then there 's that Punchbowl. I can't abide the Punchbowl with them horrid east winds. And then he don't deserve consideration, keeping away one whole day longer. Oh dear, how I wish I was dead! That would settle the matter! "

She looked up and, catching Nora's eye, she laughed, and Nora laughed too, and said:

"If I were you, Mrs Mary, I should certainly have Parrington. You know he is very fond of you and very patient with you."

"And so he ought to be!" said Mrs Mary, defiantly.

"Of course," replied Nora, "but for all that, I should n't tax his patience too much. If I were you, I should brave all my ancestors — Aunt Rebeccah Renaldson included, and I should have Parrington. Poor Parrington!"

Then they both laughed again, for it was a well-known fact that Mrs Mary Shaw delighted in teasing Parrington, and he put up with all her vagaries, knowing, no doubt, that in her heart of hearts she was really attached to him. Nevertheless, he punished her sometimes by keeping away; though this was the longest absence on record.

At this moment Wullie ran in, brimming over with fun and mischief.

"Mother," he cried, "cheer up, cheer up; here be Mr. Parrington coming down the lane, and carrying a posy in his hand. Cheer up, mother! Put yer cap straight. Here be Parrington a-coming with his best flowers."

"Well," said Mrs Mary, in a dignified way, "and what 's that to me, I 'd like to know? Here, Wullie, give me the little looking-glass, quick! Miss Nora, dear, tell me, do my cap sit quite straight?"

They had just finished tidying her hair and taking off the melancholy apron, when Parrington arrived on the scenes.

"Good evening, Miss Penhurst, mighty glad to see you," he said. "Good evening, Mrs Mary Shaw, glad to see you too. Thank you, I 'll take a glass of port wine."

CHAPTER IV

THEODORE BEVAN

THEODORE BEVAN had just come back from a walk with Nora Penhurst. He had met her on the moors, and, as a matter of course, had joined companionship with her. And now he sat in the parlour of the King's Head, and made some entries in a mysterious book which he always kept locked when he was not using it. The key was attached to his watch-chain. The book was, in fact, his journal, the receptacle of all his private thoughts and inmost aims. He smiled as he wrote, put down his pen and thought awhile, and then covered several pages with his neat, precise characters.

"Obviously gifted with a keen enjoyment of everything which life presents," he wrote. "I have probed her, and found that she is interested in everything — in nature and in knowledge, in questions of the great world to which she certainly belongs, and in the affairs of this little village, where she is resting during her holidays; for this much I have gathered — that she is a teacher, and certainly not of the dry-bones genus. An interesting personality in these days when most people are miserable, or else claim to be so. But her turn will come, and all these vital interests will pass from her. Then she will not talk of the heather being so purple, for it will not be purple to her, and she will not find honey and flowers by the wayside. She will not even notice the flowers. And she will learn something of life's burden at which she now scoffs so imperiously. I

have never before met any one quite like her. It would be an interesting experiment to find out whether I could influence such a healthy character as hers. I will try. I certainly cannot regret that I came to this out-of-the-way place to see that old castle: and, for the present, I shall not move on, since I find that she is staying here for some time yet. Nothing has amused me so much as the way in which she has received my enforced companionship, sometimes resenting my presumption, and on other occasions taking a humorous view of the situation, saying to herself, no doubt, 'Ah well, it is a distraction.' She is attracted to me one moment, and repelled from me the next. Certainly it is an experiment worth trying." Here he closed and locked his journal, and taking up his pen once more, he wrote the following letter: —

"To the Deputy Custodian.

"Greatly to my regret I find that considerable pressure of work will prevent me from enjoying the society of the deputy custodian on the morrow. I trust, however, that on the following day, events may return to their normal course, and that this most irksome interruption may be the first and last of the kind. Life being so short, we, who have any claims whatsoever to ordinary intelligence, must surely feel that congenial companionship is one of those experiences which we dare not curtail unnecessarily. If we hesitate, the moment passes.

"I send, together with this letter, a book which seems worth consideration. It is not of the kind that makes a stir in the world; but there are two or three remarkable chapters in it. I need not point them out. You will easily detect them for yourself.

"THEODORE BEVAN."

He read the letter over, and smiled coldly as he put it in an envelope and sealed it.

"I think that will do," he said; and then he put away all his papers tidily, drew the bowl of flowers nearer to him almost caressingly, picked out one or two faded ones, threw them away, and became engrossed in a book.

It was a curiously plastic face, with many varied expressions. At one moment he might have passed for a suffering saint, and the next moment any one might have judged him to be a poet, weaving beautiful thoughts and fairy fancies, and the next moment he might have sat for a ruffian, a stranger to every gentle emotion; but for all that, it was not a face alive with animal passions: it was coldly, subtly cruel, with the steely glance worthy of one of those relentless Inquisitors. Tiny of frame, he seemed capable of immense strength, for his hands and wrists were powerful. One might have imagined that he could lift an ailing person very tenderly, or that he might raise his arm to aim some fell blow. This man might, perhaps, have nursed well; or he might have been heartless beyond all dreams of heartlessness. He contracted no intimate friendships. His acquaintances in London, where he lived, had various opinions of him at various times; but he had a curious mental sway over most people, especially women, though men also came under his influence; and no one who had once known him, could get quite free from him mentally. It was just as though he wove a web and waited.

He rarely spoke of himself, and rarely alluded to his affairs, though it was generally understood that he was a man of independent means; and he never referred to any personal existence of his own, but occasionally he spoke mysteriously of "long nights of toil and pressure

of work." No one had ever seen the writings at which he seemed to hint thus vaguely, but it was taken for granted that he was one of the leader-writers on an important daily newspaper — perhaps 'The Times.' Perhaps he was. He claimed nothing for himself; he merely inferred. All the claiming was done by people who believed him capable of anything; and several times when successful books had appeared anonymously, he had been charged with the authorship, and he had merely smiled and shrugged his shoulders, inferring by his manner that people might think whatever they chose. He evidently believed in the gospel of mystery. Acquaintances who had been near him for three or four years, knew nothing more about him at the end of that period than at the beginning. He had a curious power of divination: he seemed to realise when any one was thinking unfavourably of him, and if his friends had compared notes, they would all have found that he had often arrived amongst them at the right moment to remove, by means of some specially kindly act, some specially unfavourable impression. If he liked, he could talk well about books and events and things. There were some who said that his conversation was not deep; but most people felt that he could touch any depth that he chose. There was one man, of genuine attainments and scholarship, who said that Theodore Bevan was not a scholar; and perhaps he was right, for surely true scholars can recognise their own kith and kin, and can separate them easily from vulgar pretenders who impose on the multitude. He was unsparing of his strength and interest when he wished to show a kindness; but he never spoke of his deeds of helpfulness; only it always happened, that others did so on his behalf. If questioned, he would say, "You are surely better informed

than myself." And he would pass on to the discussion of some subject in which he had no personal part. He enjoyed excellent health, but he was one of those persons who sometimes look as though they had not one moment more to live, and who are therefore objects of great interest and sympathy. That alone is sufficient to give any one power; for we are so constituted, that, in spite of our dogmas and doctrines, and all our theories about life and death, after-existence or complete annihilation — in spite of all these differentiations, we unite in yielding a kind of unconscious, tremulous reverence to him who is thought to be stepping across the border-line into the Unknown. At such a moment even ordinary people attain to power, for that stepping across the border is fraught with ineffable mystery.

But Theodore Bevan was not stepping across, and he often smiled secretly at the allusions made to his frail health; and when taken to task for thinking and studying too much, and eating only oranges and dates for breakfast, with perhaps a little brown bread added, he would answer:

"Ah, I assure you my appetite is quite good, and as for my health — perhaps I am overdriven just now. But in a few days I shall have got the better of an unusual pressure of work."

He often looked as though he had not eaten anything for a week; or, to be more correct, he looked like a vegetarian just before the breakdown, in many cases so inevitable! But, as a matter of fact, he was blessed with a particularly healthy appetite, and, when by himself, knew how to attack and conquer a solid piece of beef; whereas, in company, he toyed with his food, and seemed not to need the ordinary sustenance of everyday life. At the King's Head he displayed no such asceti-

cism, and when Mrs Mary Shaw came in to lay the cloth and bring him his supper, he willingly put aside his books and papers, without, however, directing even a hasty glance towards her and her well-filled tray.

This was the man who came into Nora Penhurst's life, and determined to teach her something about the "burden of living."

CHAPTER V

ENTER NURSE ISABEL

Nurse Isabel counted her shoes: seven pairs in all.

"I certainly must have another pair," she said to herself. "I did not realise that my stock had run so low."

She then put on her elegant coat and pretty hat, and satisfied herself that her appearance left nothing to be desired, which was indeed true. She was a most distinguished-looking woman, elegant and soothing in her indoor uniform, which was of a unique kind, devised by herself, and quite delightful in her outdoor apparel, which betrayed no signs of her profession.

"There are three classes of nurses," she said repeatedly to herself: "those who are 'fetching,' those who are scientific, and those who are neither fetching nor scientific. And, thank goodness, I belong to the first class!"

"Nursing is a domestic form of acting," she sometimes said: "all good nurses would make good actresses. I personally should have made my fortune as an actress, if only my throat had been stronger. I have everything in my favour: appearance, talent, charm; but no strength of voice — sweetness, yes, but strength, no."

She was something of a philosopher too.

"The applause which would have been mine," she said, "I have had to forgo. But, as usual, compensations have arisen, and I am grateful for them. And the greatest compensation is the variety of parts which fall to my share. Not so with the leading lady. Having

once pronounced herself comic, she dare not be tragic; once labelled as the suffering heroine, she dare not become an agent of wrong-doing. Now, at least, *I* am free to fill any *rôle*. And I can do each equally well. I can be the sweet saint, bending soothingly over some embroidery, sitting in the sunlight — when there is any, and the patient does not want the blind pulled down! I can be silent for hours together, or I can talk cleverly on ordinary subjects, such as Grieg, Ibsen, Rembrandt, and the Chinese Empress. I can read the Bible with reverent piety, or a racing novel with sparkling brightness. I can laugh. I can weep. I can be cynical. I can be fresh-hearted."

All of which was quite true. The only puzzle was why she had not been able to put such extraordinary talents to more than ordinary advantage. Some such thoughts crossed her mind to-day, when she left her lodging to go out and buy that eighth pair of shoes. She was tired and out of spirits, out of conceit with the whole world, and out of conceit with herself. She had just finished nursing an irritable old lady, who had mercifully betaken herself and her irritability to another planet, and Nurse Isabel determined to give herself a short holiday and enjoy a little of outdoor life and shop windows.

But the noise of Oxford Street seemed almost too much for her nerves.

"I am not myself to-day," she said to herself. "The world seems to me a living mass of irritable old ladies, all wanting the windows closed and the blinds down. I certainly must not take another old lady patient yet, nor another literary person. I don't know which class tires me the most."

She looked at a tempting little pair of red kid shoes, with black velvet heels, but did not care to take the

trouble to go in and buy them. She must have been unusually out of spirits to show such listlessness where shoes were concerned: they were her speciality, her most accentuated tendency, as the little stranger with the broad eye-glass ribbon would have called it. She gazed indolently at the shop-windows, observed the latest tricks of fashion, and decided how she might best modify them to suit her own individual charms; but nothing gave her real pleasure this morning, and when she saw the Forest Hill omnibus pass, she almost thought she would go and see her mother, and just have a few hours' restful change; but, unfortunately, she was not at all fond of the suburbs. Her dislike of the suburbs conquered her yearning for her mother, and the Forest Hill omnibus passed on its way, and Nurse Isabel strolled home even more listless than before. She did not even criticise the other hospital nurses whom she passed on her way: their cloaks, and bonnets, and the colour of their uniform were matters of indifference to her to-day, and she did not pity any one for being so obviously inferior to herself. And that was quite unusual with her; for, in her normal condition of mind, she had the profoundest pity for all humanity, especially hospital-nurse humanity, for not being as charming as herself.

When she reached her lodging, she found a telegram waiting for her, and at once went off to see the doctor, who summoned her to his presence.

"I cannot refuse to take a case from him," she said, as she hastened to his house. "However, most of his patients are men, thank goodness, so there is no fear of my being bothered with another irritable old lady. Perhaps I shall have a cricketer, or a Life-Guardsman. I wonder which it will be?" And as she went on her way, she tossed it up in her mind.

The doctor heaved a sigh of relief when he saw her.

"I am so glad that you are disengaged, Nurse Isabel," he said, contentedly. "Here is a case which I have very much at heart, a case which needs a special kind of nurse: some one artistic and cultured, some one with refined ways and pleasing appearance, some one to soothe a troubled spirit, and help to find that readjustment which can be found, given only the right conditions."

Nurse Isabel, standing there in the sunshine, seemed to combine all these marvellous gifts.

Then the doctor continued:

"He has had typhoid fever, from which he recovered, but it has left him in a weakened condition; and then several heavy troubles, and one bad shock coming on the top of his illness, have shattered his nervous system. He is an historian. You probably know his name — Brian Uppingham, the well-known author of 'The Intellectual Evolution of Europe.'"

"Ah," said Nurse Isabel, sympathetically, but her heart sank. Alas! where was her cricketer or her Life-Guardsman now?

"He has had a house lent him in Graystoke," said the doctor, "a very charming and bracing place, and it is there that I want you to go and to nurse him back to health and possibilities of renewed work. He is already there, having been taken down by a friend who has to leave him on the morrow, and so I propose that you join him immediately."

She received all the details and instructions with a truly charming amiability of manner which exactly corresponded with the savage disappointment of her mind.

"You are going to a delightful part of the country," the physician said, as she was leaving, "and you must not fail to visit that fine old castle."

As she left him, she thought to herself, "Why, why am I considered so charming? Certainly one has to pay the price of everything in this life." However, she accepted the circumstances, always being something of a philosopher, and hastened home to pack her clothes and catch her train for the nearest station to Graystoke, which, as far as she could make out, was situated about eleven miles from even the ghost of a railway station.

"All the same," she said to herself as she was packing, "this literary person shall be the last on my list for some time to come. If I did not need country air, and if I were not afraid of offending that doctor, the historian might sink into the tomb for all I should care. Historian indeed!"

She gathered her clothes together, not forgetting the Grecian evening dress on which she set great store, for she affected classical costumes, feeling that she was seen to best advantage in them, and she had long since adopted the Grecian style of hair-architecture, which specially suited her features. In less than two hours she had finished her preparations, packed her box, written to her mother, and enclosed in the letter a postal order for pin-money, dressed the wounded hand of the little lad downstairs, and was soon leaning back in the railway carriage, satisfied on the whole that she was leaving London.

"The country is good for the nerves," she thought. "In my leisure hours, I shall stroll in the woods, if there is nothing more exciting to do, and I shall pick flowers from the hedges, and I shall even learn a little botany, and perhaps a little geology too. So if I get my nerves into better condition, and add some flowers and rocks to my general knowledge, I shall not do so badly after all."

She was not interested in knowledge for its own sake,

but she had a remarkable aptitude for picking up facts and suggestions; and many an intellectual person might well have envied her her keen mind and quick perception. She was a genius at annexing other people's sentiments and opinions — annexing them so thoroughly, too, that they seemed to be part of herself, and not the property of some one else.

So this afternoon, when she was nearing the station, she listened attentively to the disjointed remarks of an old farmer, and learnt from him many particulars of the country, and gleaned information in her own masterly way.

Then she leaned out of the window, and felt the freshness of the air.

"What delightful air!" she exclaimed, "and how good for one's health."

"You be coming here for health, then?" the old farmer inquired, sympathetically, for her face looked tired and drawn.

"Yes," she answered, though she did not think it necessary to add for whose health she had journeyed thus far from London. No one could have found out that she was a nurse; she looked like an elegant lady of ease, with the fag-end of a sorrowful history attached to her; she spoke like a leisured gentlewoman who has spared the time from her idleness to cultivate a language or two, a little music, a few politics, and to take an indolent interest in the affairs of the passing moment. Her very voice had at times a slight peevishness about it, generally found in conjunction with wealth and ease. She puzzled the footman who stood waiting on the platform for a hospital nurse of the usual type. As no one of this pattern got out of the train, he naturally concluded that the nurse had not come; and he was

chatting with his friend, the station-master, and asking particulars about the horse-fair, when an elegant lady approached him and made inquiries as to whether a carriage had been sent from the Moat House. He was so much impressed with her appearance and manner that he could not summon up courage to ask if she were the hospital nurse. She waved her hand condescendingly in the direction of her luggage, and waited until he opened the door of the old-fashioned carriage, and then she stepped in.

"I must have the top of the carriage pulled down instantly," she said, imperiously. "I do not care to be shut in like this."

The footman, mystified but quelled, obeyed her instructions.

And thus in the pleasant cool of the evening was Nurse Isabel driven to the scene of her labours.

CHAPTER VI

A MEETING ON THE MOORS

THE scent of the heather at six o'clock in the morning; health, strength, and good spirits, and one's life to one's self.

That beautiful colour which you can never forget! And when you are in a distant land where the heather does not grow, but where the colours in the sky are legion, you search for that purple shade and you say: "Ah, that is like the heather!" Then the delicious fragrance steals over your senses, together with the sweet memories of your native land.

There was an unusual freshness in the air which was in itself uplifting, and Nora strolled over the moors followed by the three dogs from the Castle and the King's Head. Now and again she bent to fling a stone or stick for them, or stood to watch them scampering after the rabbits. The joy of life was in them too: they did not know anything about the burden of living.

"The burden of living!" laughed Nora; and her thoughts wandered away from the heather and the clouds, and all the gladness of the early morning, and those forty-three essays on Ambition corrected and sent off by yesterday's post — wandered away to that strange little man who had begun an acquaintance with her as a matter of course. There was something in him which attracted and repelled her too, but the attraction and repulsion were never balanced so as to produce indifference. One touch in him she liked immensely; he never

attempted to account for himself in any way, and she was never conscious that he tried to make her account for herself. So far as each of them knew, they might have dropped down from different planets on to this one little spot on this planet, and, finding themselves here, of course began to talk. She had not even known his name until last evening, when she had received that letter from him in which he signed himself "Theodore Bevan." She took it from her pocket now, and read it over again, half amused at, and yet half annoyed with the quiet but determined insistence of the writer; and she was just on the point of tearing up the note, when she changed her mind, and replaced the mysterious document in her pocket.

"I must really show it to father," she said; "I wonder what he would think of my little stranger. He would at once find a nickname for him."

Then her thoughts turned to her father, and the expression on her face betrayed how much she loved him; not with the traditional devotion of a child to its parents, but with the affectionate understanding and sympathy of one human being for another human being, the relationship coming in as an accident and yet as a bond. She had inherited some part of his rich nature, together with his keen delight in life, and his sense of humour. That alone was an inheritance worth having — sufficient compensation, as he would have said, for Nora's disadvantage in having had a father at all! She had written begging him to join her, and he had sent a letter which she received last night, saying that perhaps he would come, and perhaps he would not come; in any case, he would arrive at his own hour; and he had added:

"I saw your little friend, Mrs Ellerton, yesterday.

She asked me to remember to tell you that there is a friend of hers, Nurse Isabel, staying at the Moat House, nursing some one or other, and that you were to be good to her, as she is having a very dull time, and her spirits are down at zero. All I can say is, that I am sorry for the patient, if the nurse is depressed."

She smiled as she remembered his words, and she crossed the moor, and left the land of heather for a barer region of downs, furrowed and creased like a weather-beaten old man's face. She was not sure that she did not care more for this barren tract, with its uncompromising frown, than for that fairer district with its purple regal garment — and yet not uncompromising either; for the sun broke forth, and some of the rays nestled in the deep wrinkles, and all the harshness was tempered as though by magic: the stern realities were softened by the idealities.

She had reached a little group of pine-trees which was her favourite retreat. From this point she could view the whole expanse of country so dear to her heart, and here all the winds of heaven seemed to meet, and blow strength into her. She watched the light and the shadows of the clouds and the many varied expressions on these barren moors, and the clouds themselves now passing swiftly, now pausing lazily, whilst the sweet fresh air swept through her, quickening all her pulses, and confirming all her strength of brain and body.

Those who love Nature truly, never quite lose their childlike impressions of her. What they have as children observed in her and loved in her, what they have as children compared her with and likened her to — that they still see in her and love in her with a persistence which time cannot efface. She gathers them to her, as in the old days. They are only little children

to her, for all their growth of mind and stature; they come back to the nursery, time after time, and are glad to play about, or else to rest; they may do as they please if only they come; their playthings are waiting for them, their cradle is waiting for them. It will always be the same, year after year. So Nora this morning played in Nature's nursery, seeing pictures in the skies, and fairy forms in the clouds, and rugged old faces on the moors. She watched, and wove fairy fancies for herself out of Nature's changing moods, until the dogs, waiting patiently for her, looked up wistfully, and wondered why she lingered so long, and asked her in their own eloquent, irresistible manner, to go on her journey and not check their anxious activity.

But suddenly they dashed off, barking, and Nora, looking in the direction in which they ran, saw an elegantly dressed lady coming towards her, and wondered who she could be. Nora noticed at once that she had a most pleasing appearance and an interesting face, which was rather pale and delicate. Whoever she was, she showed every sign of being immensely important to herself, and bore herself with an air worthy of the serenest highness in the universe.

She paused as she came near Nora, and having bestowed a hasty glance on her, and satisfied herself, no doubt, that this stranger was not unworthy of being addressed, she smiled graciously and said stiffly:

"Pray excuse me. But can you oblige me by telling me the time, and also where I am? I believe I have lost myself."

Nora, somewhat tickled by her condescending manner, which seemed so out of place on the moors at seven o'clock in the morning, told her the time, and showed her the path which would lead her to the main road over

the moors, and then expected that she would pass on her royal progress to her royal destination. But the lady was apparently in no hurry to reach her palace; moreover, she was tired, and she was not dressed in a style suitable for a rough walk.

"These moors are really most tiring," she said in an injured tone of voice. "I think, if you will allow me, I will rest here a few moments. But they do not seem to have tired you," she added, glancing admiringly at Nora who stood leaning up against a tree, looking the picture of health, surrounded by the dogs, and holding in her hands a splendid bunch of heather.

"Oh, I am used to them," said Nora, smiling; "but all the same, the roads are rather rough. The soldiers cut them up dreadfully during the manœuvre-time. See, here is a capital seat on this old stump."

"I have had such very bad nights lately," said her Majesty, sinking down to rest. "And so I thought I would try whether the morning air would not refresh me. Besides, even an outing like this makes a change in a monotonous life. Anything, indeed, is welcome which causes a diversion. For there are not many distractions to be found in this out-of-the-way place, and one gets so tired of driving in an antediluvian carriage, with two sleepy horses and two still sleepier men-servants. After each drive I come back more depressed than when I started."

"You have not been to the Castle, I think?" asked Nora, "at least, I do not remember seeing you there."

"Ah, that's a good idea," replied her Majesty, brightening up. "As a rule, I abominate castles, but when there is nothing else, even castles have their use. I shall certainly come."

"And there are some delightful places in the neigh-

bourhood," continued Nora. "The two sleepy horses could very well take you there. If you'll come to the Castle, I will tell you about these other excursions. And now I think I must be going."

"For goodness' sake don't go," said the lady, parting suddenly with all her dignity. "It's positively more than eight weeks since I have exchanged a word with any one except the two sleepy coachmen, the deaf doctor, and my most uninteresting invalid and his aged housekeeper; and I don't know which of them is the worst."

Then Nora recalled Mrs Ellerton's message about the nurse at the Moat House.

"Are you Nurse Isabel?" she asked, a little timidly, and when the other nodded her head affirmatively, Nora told her that Mrs Ellerton had written about her.

"It is not possible to describe to you what a dull time I am having," said Nurse Isabel. "I have been actually reduced to reading Shakespeare and Ruskin, and looking at photographs of celebrated paintings and places. Of course that sort of thing comes in useful, but at the same time it is not electric."

"And what about your patient?" asked Nora, much amused with her new acquaintance, who seemed the very last person on earth suitable for the sick-room.

"Oh, he is not electric either," said Nurse Isabel, plaintively. In fact I have had a run of ill-luck these last months, each case being more depressing than the last. But," she added piously, "I suppose it ought to be enough for me to do my duty. But duty is not an exciting thing, is it?"

The two young women looked at each other and laughed, for Nurse Isabel's sudden paroxysm of piety was comical even to herself.

"And is your patient going to die or recover?" asked Nora.

"Oh, he is recovering," said Nurse Isabel. "He has not been dangerously ill since I have been there; he goes on all the time slowly regaining his health. I think he must have been slow about everything ever since his birth. And he always wants to be read to, a task I particularly dislike. It tires my voice, so I don't very often humour him. Besides, he chooses such absurd books — books of travel; my pet abomination is geography, and he insists on finding the places on the maps. I always detested maps."

"What a cheerful time you must both have!" remarked Nora. "I don't know for whom I am most sorry, you or him. May I ask who he is?"

"Oh, certainly," said Nurse Isabel, in a most friendly way; "he is the historian, Mr Brian Uppingham."

"Brian Uppingham!" said Nora. "Why, he ought to be interesting. He wrote that splendid book on the 'Intellectual Evolution of Europe.'"

"Ah," said Nurse Isabel, "I can quite believe it. That is just the sort of thing he would write."

"I should like very much to see him," said Nora. "Let us change places. I will come and read to your patient, and you can come and be deputy custodian at the Castle. And then you can make the acquaintance of my strange little visitor who seems to have dropped down here out of some other world. He comes nearly every day to see me."

"I don't wonder at his coming," said Nurse Isabel, looking at Nora with frank admiration.

Nora blushed, and whistled for the dogs, who had again gone hunting.

"I think I must be going home now," she said. "Shall we go together, if you are rested?"

So they walked on together, and Nurse Isabel said:

"By the way, I have quite forgotten to ask what report there was of Mr Ellerton."

"Mrs Ellerton said that he had just discovered another ailment," answered Nora.

"Ah, I am glad to hear that," replied Nurse Isabel, gravely. "It will keep him in excellent health and spirits for quite six weeks!"

And then they talked about Mrs Ellerton and her hypochondriacal husband, and from that they turned to the subject of nursing, and Nora said that she had a great reverence for those who looked after the sick and dying. "They are the guardians of the nation," she said, warmly, "and they should be duly honoured — like the Vestal Virgins, in fact."

Nurse Isabel did not feel like a guardian of a nation, and she said a little guiltily, "Have you ever known any of them?"

"Only one," answered Nora, staunchly.

"Ah," said Nurse Isabel, "that may account for your opinion of them."

"It does," said Nora. "She nursed me week after week with unfailing tenderness and devotion, and I thought her the most beautiful character that I had ever even dreamt of."

"Ah," said Nurse Isabel, with a sigh, "it is difficult to live up to a beautiful character. It is extremely unfair when a patient claims that from you too. But then, patients are very inconsiderate."

So they laughed and chatted, and Nurse Isabel was charmed to have companionship, and delighted with her new acquaintance. Hitherto she had never cultivated women friends, but she suddenly felt what a real pleasure it must be to have a friendship with a woman. Then

and there her heart went out to Nora. She picked heather and bracken; she flung bits of sticks for the dogs; the worldliness fled from her soul, the jadedness from her spirit; and when at last they came down over the moors and stood by a bend of the river, she gathered reeds and bulrushes as though to the manner born.

"I declare I feel quite a different person," she said, brightly, "thanks to this pleasant time I have had with you. You will see me at the Castle before very long, and, mind, I shall expect you to come and read to my historian."

CHAPTER VII

'THE ETERNAL BATTLE'

"WELL," said Theodore Bevan, "and you have read the book?"

"Yes," answered Nora. "It is full of bitterness."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't expect such a subject to be laden with honey?" he said.

"I expect people who write on such a vital subject as the eternal battle between the old and the young to show some sort of balanced judgment," Nora answered, warmly.

He smiled his thin cynical smile, and made no answer, and the two companions walked on silently, crossing the old bridge and following the river's course along the sweet-scented meadows. They stopped to look at some cows drinking, and Nora bent down to gather some forget-me-nots, late lingerers from the spring, and passed on as silently as before. She had intended to spend that afternoon by herself, down by the river, and was feeling annoyed that Theodore Bevan, finding her there, had not shown tact enough to leave her alone, since he must have seen from her reluctant manner that she was desiring solitude. Perhaps the most irritating part of the whole matter was that she had not known how to shake herself free from him. She was not wanting in moral pluck, but she was hampered by a fine sense of courtesy; and when a person refuses to be dismissed, good breeding is often quite weaponless. So he

came with her for her favourite walk, and took no umbrage at her obvious indifference to the advantages of his society; in fact, it amused him, and he said to himself:

"My Athene" — for he had christened her that in his journal — "my Athene is in a non-receptive mood this afternoon, but it will not last long — one quarter of an hour at the utmost, and what is that?"

He was right, for it was not in Nora's nature to remain sullen, and she soon got the better of her irritation. Besides, there was something compelling in his presence.

"Well," she said, turning to him, "and I should like to hear what you find to admire in the book you lent me."

"First of all," he answered, "I admire the courage of the writer. It is not every one who will dare to take up the cudgels for the young against the old. We all know that old people are selfish and narrow and demanding; most of us have personal experiences to testify to this general knowledge. Many of us have had our lives spoiled and embittered by the old, and all our golden days of possibilities and enjoyments, yes, and our just rights of individuality and freedom, wrested from us by unfair means. For the weapon which the old use against us is irresistible; *it is their old age.*"

He paused for a moment, and Nora looked at him with added interest.

"And I tell you," he added, almost fiercely, "they use their weapon mercilessly. We all know this — we who have felt the edge of that weapon — but who has dared to say anything? We have just endured, and the sacrifice has gone on as a matter of course. But this writer has broken through the silence at last, has broken down that barrier of awe and absurd reverence which tradition has placed between the old and the young; and,

having got rid of the barrier, has stepped out into open country, and urges us to do the same."

"'Now we can face each other,' he says, 'now we can speak freely to each other, and on equal terms. Hitherto we have had to listen to the long list of our failings. Now our moment has come, and we have won for ourselves the right to make you old people hear about your own failings, and about our grievances, and —'"

He paused again, and Nora broke in earnestly:

"It is nothing new to you or me, or any one, that time has brought about a much-needed change in the relations between the old and the young. It is true that not much has been written about it, but a great deal has been done silently to bring about a readjustment which shall be satisfactory to both sides. All I say is, that it should be done without any exaggerated insistence and aggressiveness, and with some sense of justice. The old have their rights as well as we. But this author sweeps all their claims on one side; and, moreover, does away with all sentiment."

"Sentiment!" sneered Theodore Bevan.

"Sentiment," she repeated. "It is absurd to try and hustle sentiment off the scenes; it comes into everything human. It cannot be argued away; it cannot even be analysed; it cannot even be driven out by sneers or laughter."

"You are always an anachronism," he said, quietly.

"And, moreover, your writer is brutal without being skilful," she continued, not deigning to notice his interruption. "It is true that we have to wound our old people in stating our own case; we have to hurt their pride and prejudices, and trample on some of their most cherished traditions; but if we are careful how we do it, the wounds will heal up, and no poison of bitterness

and unkindness will remain. For we do not want the old to suffer unnecessarily. That would not be progress. That would be a return to barbarism."

"You are evidently prejudiced in their favour," Theodore Bevan said. "Probably you believe in them. I do not."

Nora was silent, overpowered for the moment by a rush of conflicting feelings: her own happy experiences with her own father, and her own definite knowledge of the unhappy experiences which some of her friends always had with their old people. In this very village, too, near at hand, was a striking instance of the unwarrantable selfishness of the old, which went on as a matter of course, and was marring the life and condition of a plucky and cheery woman. Mrs Mary Shaw might laugh about her "ancestors" and their trying characteristics, but they were engrossing the best part of her life, and demanding the entire sacrifice of her personal inclinations and her own individual rights. It was a specially happy illustration in a simple sphere, where the complications of intellectual and external life did not come into the question.

"Perhaps I do believe in them," she said at last. "I am sure I have every reason. No one could have had such a splendid old father as I have, and not believe in them."

"And it is well for you if you can believe in them," he said. "But for my own part, when I wish to read of mellow old age, a haven of peace for the young and restless, with sympathies stretching, like the roots of an ancient oak, from one generation to another, now in this direction, and now in that; and like the oak, too, spreading its protecting boughs for those who need its generous hospitality — when I want to meet with such a grand old

age as this, I go to fiction. One must not go to real life for that. There one only finds the ugly barren realities which shrivel up one's mind. There one stumbles upon that extraordinary selfishness which is the most accentuated tendency of the old."

"But the young are selfish too," Nora said, quickly. "I don't think there is much to choose between us. It merely takes a different form."

"There is a tremendous difference between the selfishness of thoughtlessness practised by the young, and the selfishness which old age has made its settled and deliberate habit," he answered, coldly. "But you must have observed all this yourself, and if you could free yourself from that primæval sentimentality which prevents any clear vision, you would confess the truth without flinching. Then you would look at life as it really is, and not as the idealists make it. But it requires courage for that."

"And do you suppose," said Nora, looking down at him from her heights, — "do you suppose that you are the only person who has not been afraid to lay hold of life and look at it closely? Perhaps others have looked at it just as narrowly, but seen different things."

"Perhaps so," he answered.

"This book," said Nora, "is the work of some one whose life has been embittered by injustice and tyranny. There is not one single note of pity sounded."

("Pity!" he sneered.)

"Not even a passing cadence of kindness and consideration: no allusion to duty."

("Duty!" he repeated, coldly.)

"And no question of reasonable forbearance; nothing about compromise, and of course nothing about affection."

("Affection!" he murmured.)

"It dwells entirely on the battle which must be fought between the old and the young, and which must be perpetually carried on at any price. And there is to be no quarter —"

"There can be no quarter," he said, imperiously. "Don't you see that?"

"No, I do not," she replied. "Of course I, as well as you, believe firmly that these difficult questions, so long shirked, should be aired and discussed. I do not think that any false sentiment — by the way, you do not seem to know the difference between sentiment and false sentiment — that any false sentiment should prevent us from examining closely the situation, and determining, each one for himself or herself, on an attitude which should combine a certain amount of freedom with a certain amount of recognised responsibility. The proportion of the combination must obviously vary with the different circumstances in which we all find ourselves placed. But I do think that fine and delicate feeling should hinder us from behaving as though we were mere churls, and had only one wish, our own emancipation at the expense of every one else."

He smiled at her as one might smile at a child displaying her ignorance.

"Oh, I understand that you are amused with me," she said; "but just wait one moment, and then I have done. Last year a friend of mine wrote a book on the marriage question. It had an immense success; but men, in talking of it, called it *a woman's book*. We have yet to be given a book on the marriage question, which is neither a woman's book nor a man's book, but *a human book*, equally true and telling for both sides. And it must not be written by an embittered wife or an angry husband, but by some one who can see clearly the two

sides of the question: by some one who has suffered, but without contracting a moral and mental disease. And so with regard to these most difficult relations between the old and the young: if a book of any real value is to be written to help us, it should not be a 'young' book nor an 'old' book, but a book for all humanity, so free from any bitterness, and so beautifully courteous, that the old and the young might study it together, and, having read it, might stretch out their arms in longing for a better understanding and friendship."

"You do me a wrong if you think I wish to laugh at you," Theodore Bevan said, quite gently. "You are an idealist, and we do not speak the same language. That is all. I catch some of your words, and you catch some of mine. And perhaps I wish that I had been taught to speak your language, and —"

He stopped abruptly, and Nora glanced at him and noticed an expression of infinite sadness and suffering on his face. Her sympathy went out to him at once. Perhaps he was one of those whose lives had been overshadowed by the tyranny and selfishness of old age, and the mere remembrance of it all had made him suffer afresh and speak with exaggerated harshness.

"We have been talking on a very serious subject," she said, with softened manner, "and I feel as though I had parted with some of my life's blood."

"You should have kept it for a better cause," he said, slowly. "You plead well for the old people, but I consider they are hopeless. We cannot make friends of them: they are our enemies to the backbone. They have always been our enemies. And when we are old, you and I, then we will be the enemies of the young, using our weapon, old age —"

She turned impatiently from him as though she had

heard enough; and in the moment of her revulsion, she heard the sound of wheels on the highroad, which they had just reached. It was the blacksmith's gig, and David the blacksmith, stout and cheery, sat upright, occupying, as he quaintly put it, "the mere space of a tiny sparrer."

"David," she said, "I am tired. Give me a lift to the Castle."

"David," she said, when she was comfortably installed, "give me the reins, light your pipe, and tell me how you used to catch trout with your hands when you were a boy."

"Why, Miss Nora, I 've told you a dozen times," he said, "and you 'll be tired of my stories."

"Tell me all over again from the beginning," urged Nora; and David, nothing loath, told, in his own delightful way, the story of his happy boyhood.

Meanwhile Theodore Bevan walked slowly home, turning over many things in his mind.

"My Athene must not be allowed to treat me like that a second time," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

NORA'S FATHER

For two or three days the little stranger did not come to the Castle, and Nora did not know whether she was relieved or distressed by his absence. She finished correcting some of her examination papers, and she entertained Nurse Isabel at afternoon tea. And she went for a long walk by herself, and found herself thinking constantly of Theodore Bevan, dwelling on his arguments against old age, recalling his bitter animosity, hardening her heart against him, and then almost unconsciously relenting. Full of these thoughts, over which she had no control, she came home by way of the village, and, passing the King's Head, she suddenly saw a certain species of luggage which she could have identified anywhere. A violoncello in a green case, a violin, a zither, a small handbag, and a schoolboy's book-box lay deposited casually in front of the inn.

Nora gave a cry of pleasure, and hastened in.

"Mrs Shaw," she said, "surely father is here?"

"Here I am, my dear girl," cried a voice from the corner of the kitchen. "I thought I must come and see how you were getting on. I was famished with hunger, and so Mrs Shaw provided me with some grouse. I believe it was cooked for the lodger upstairs, but that is no affair of mine, and he could not have enjoyed it as I am doing."

"Dear old father," said Nora, as she sat down beside him, "it is good to see you; and how well you look!"

"Yes, but I have missed you dreadfully," he said, as he took her hand and kissed it. "It is an awful business being without you. That is the worst of a close friendship. Well, one has to pay one's price for everything. Give me some more bread-sauce, my dear."

She smiled lovingly at him, and drew her chair closer.

"I did not really intend coming," he said. "I thought it was better for you to have your holiday to yourself, and not be bothered with anything old. But I could not keep away any longer, and so this morning, I put together a few absolutely necessary things, and here I am!"

"It is lovely to be with you again," said Nora. "I am sorry, though, that you have not brought a few more musical instruments! I wonder you did not bring a drum and a trombone."

"Don't be impertinent!" he answered. "There, I have done my dinner. Let us go and get the key of the organ, and have some music in the church."

"Oh, father," she cried, "I am just starved for music. And I am longing to hear the new Grancino 'cello."

"Ah, he is a beauty," her father answered as he lit a cigar. "He ought to sound well in that old church, with the stained glass and oak carvings. I've brought ever so much music with me — all your favourite melodies, Nora; I had a sort of fancy to play them here."

"If it's music you're talking about," said Mrs Shaw, coming into the kitchen at that moment, "I must come too."

"Come along," he said, genially. "Leave the inn and the ancestors and the bread-loaves to take care of themselves, and come and rest in the dear old church. Why,

many a time I have remembered how you used to sit there and listen. You too shall hear some of the melodies you love. I did not forget them for you. And here is Wullie, just in time to blow the bellows for us. Well, Wullie, my lad, still a good boy? Or have you begun the downward path?"

So with a smile here and a greeting there, and a moment's chat with this ancestor and that, and a reckless distribution of a few remaining cigars in a crumpled envelope, Nora and her father passed hand-in-hand on their way towards the village church, whilst Wullie ran on to get the key, and Mrs Mary Shaw lingered behind for a few minutes to take her bread out of the oven.

"Oh yes, I am getting on pretty well with my work," Nora was saying. "I have nearly finished two sets of examination papers. But of course I have been out of doors most of the time, and then I have made the acquaintance of that hospital nurse who is nursing at the Moat House, and I 've seen a good deal of Mrs. Shaw's lodger, whom she dislikes so much, and who has taken your old sitting-room. I am not sure that I do not dislike him too. But really I don't know — he is certainly interesting. I have seen him nearly every day, for the last fortnight or so; but on one occasion we had rather a warm discussion, and since then he has not paid his usual visit to me. I think I have missed him."

"What was it you fought over?" asked her father.

"Old people," answered Nora. "He talked very bitterly about them."

"Well, I am not surprised at that," said her father, smiling. "They represent a class of persons to which you know I have never been attached."

They both laughed at that, and waited in the old porch until Wullie came with the key of the church; and then they passed in, and stood for a few moments, held by the charm of the noble roof, the graceful columns, and the fine old choir with its rare stained window of bygone times. He pointed out to her his favourite bits, pouring out to her a golden goblet full of rich enthusiasm and appreciation, and then at length he took possession of the organ. Nora sat in one of the front seats and watched him. He was not exactly a handsome old man, but he had a grand head encircled by an abundance of soft grey hair, none too tidy. He wore a shaggy grey beard, none too tidy either. His bright eyes had lost nothing of the fire of youth, and his whole presence seemed endowed with a vitality which, instead of being aggressive, was simply charming.

Nora always loved him, but she loved him best when he was playing on the organ or the violoncello. He knew how to give one the real thrill of the loveliest of all languages. He touched the notes, and one's whole being vibrated in response; emotions and sensations, dull or dormant, sprang into life once more; beautiful new thoughts were born, and bad old thoughts were chased away. It was always so when he played; people always said it of him. It was not that he was such a wonderful performer — there were hundreds better than he — but that he knew the secret of life and music; and when a man has that double knowledge, then only can he give the thrill. There was an old philosopher, some one well known in the world of thought, and he used to love to listen to Roger Penhurst's playing.

"Ah," he would say, "when we have a philosopher who is also a true musician, then indeed we shall be led to heights now well-nigh impossible to scale. Sometimes

when I have been listening to Roger Penhurst's rendering of beautiful music, my mind has bounded forward, and broken down one more barrier."

This afternoon he began with Mendelssohn's "Hear my prayer" and "Had I the wings of a dove," and worked his way into one of Bach's Preludes and Fugues, and thence rambled on until he reached Beethoven's Mass in D, and turned aside to Grieg's Spring Songs. Then he paused a moment, and plunged into Mendelssohn's Grand Prelude and Fugue, which ends with that broad and magnificent Chorale. That indeed can make one's spirit soar if ever music could; that indeed can break a barrier down.

When the last sounds had died away, Nora bent over him.

"Come, dear," she said, "you must be tired."

So he put his hand in hers, and let her lead him away from the organ: and as they strolled down the aisles, examining the quaint old brasses on the pavements, and the splendid old carved oak pews with many curious devices, they found Mrs Mary Shaw resting quietly, with her apron over her face. They smiled at each other and passed her without a word, knowing that she was busy with her emotions. At the end of the church, in the last pew, sat Theodore Bevan, looking tired and pallid. He glanced at Nora and bowed, and glanced at Nora's father, and drew his thin lips together. Nora quite unconsciously dropped her father's hand.

When they were out in the open, Roger Penhurst said:

"Who was that atrabilious little Voltaire to whom you bowed?"

"Oh, he is Mrs Shaw's lodger, and my new acquaintance," Nora said.

"He does not attract me at first sight," said her father, lighting a cigar, "but I should certainly like to measure his head. It is small, but remarkable. Have you measured it?"

"No," said Nora, laughing.

CHAPTER IX

CONTAINS A LITTLE GEOGRAPHY

NURSE ISABEL rose from her sofa, looked at her watch, and yawned.

"Time for his medicine, afternoon tea, and some of his dull conversation," she said; "but I simply will not read any more of that absurd book of travels to-day. Arizona indeed! As though I cared anything about Arizona! I am sure I was patient enough yesterday, reading until my poor vocal cords nearly broke, and looking out ridiculous places on the map until my head was nearly racked with pain. I am certainly not going to be patient for two days running. I am not a saint yet — thank goodness!"

In this amiable frame of mind, she chose a most unsaintly looking pair of shoes from her closely-packed regiment under the dressing table, and dressed herself in her afternoon uniform, an artistic flowing grey gown, fastened at the back with twenty-four buttons. She wore a fascinating cap after the fashion of an Italian peasant girl's head-dress. A white apron, and a white collar and cuffs completed an appearance of soothing refinement which had deceived many learned doctors who prided themselves — as of course they always do — on their unusual powers of insight into character. She lingered for some time before the looking-glass, gazing at those features for which she had an intense admiration, and then she put into her pocket two or three letters received that morning from nurse friends, sympa-

thising with her over the dull desolation which she was enduring so nobly. There was a note, too, from a former man patient, with whom she had not had a dull time, and who now sent her a rare stamp for her stamp-album, annexed from his wife's collection. She read this letter and smiled; and finally went into her invalid's room, feeling decidedly braced up.

"Now," she thought to herself, "if he will only keep from referring to his own despair about his literary work, and from worrying me to read to him out of that absurd book of travels, it is quite possible that I may remain in good spirits and a good temper for the whole afternoon. But he is the dullest man I ever had to deal with. And as for his History book — I don't see anything in it. I don't see why it should have made him famous. And why he should have fretted himself into a fever over a second History book, is also more than I can make out. But really, these literary people are a horrid nuisance, and a great deal worse than irritable old ladies. At least the old ladies do not write Histories, and do not crave to be read to out of geography books!"

"Well," said she to her patient, who had raised himself up on the couch as she came in, and turned to her with a smile on his face, "why, I declare you look brighter. Have you had a good rest and forgotten all your worries and anxieties?"

"I've been enjoying a most delightful dream," Brian Uppingham said, eagerly. "I dreamed, Nurse Isabel, that I had finished and published my new volume of History; that I had been able to write down the opinions which I had been harbouring in my mind for so long; and I recall now so vividly the mood in which I did it all; there was no harassing doubt, no anxiety of any kind, but just pure enjoyment, just a strong and

quiet consciousness of power to be wielded in the fashion most suiting my fancy. But what I remember most vividly was the joy of having actually accomplished the book, and knowing that it was not unworthy; but not that so much as the satisfaction of having braced myself up and done it in spite of my former success. Ah, you smile at that, because you do not understand. Yet, I tell you, some anxious temperaments can be as much intimidated by success as by failure. But in this dream of mine, that great weight was lifted from my mind, and I felt as though I could sing from very glee."

He paused a moment, and then said:

"But the best part of the dream came afterwards, when I awoke, and realised that not only in dream life, but in real life too, I had broken through my prison of doubt and impotence, and was free."

"Those are the first sensible words I have heard you say during these last depressing weeks," said Nurse Isabel, as she poured out the tea. "Now, for goodness' sake, don't have a relapse! Of course I can't understand you: no sensible person could. Good gracious! If I had made a success over anything whatsoever—a History book, or a skirt-dance, or anything—I should not have been '*intimidated*.' But there is no accounting for people. Anyway, don't have a relapse. My nerves will not stand it. I have come to the end of my endurance."

"Why, I never knew you had any," remarked Brian Uppingham, cheerfully, "and I thought I had made a careful study of you, too. Tell me something about this wonderful endurance. I should like to learn."

Nurse Isabel was for the moment stunned. A change had come over her patient, and she had not yet adjusted herself to the difference. He was no longer dull; he was waking up. This was indeed surprising. And to think

that such change should come because you suddenly find yourself able to write another History book!

"Ah, well," he said, "I dare say you have had a dreary time of it. I do not think you have tried to help me, but no doubt you could not have succeeded even if you had tried; and I don't blame you. I blame that idiot of a specialist for making an unsuitable choice in you."

"I don't think he would have found any one suitable," remarked Nurse Isabel, pleasantly. "You see, you are a particularly irritable creature, and you would have hated any one; and therefore, probably, I have answered the purpose as well as any other poor victim."

"I should have thought that I was the 'poor victim,' in having been nursed by any one so unsympathetic as yourself," said Brian Uppingham, smiling. "But as for hating you, I've done nothing of the sort, and I have not been as dull as you. You have amused me intensely. I have not amused you, have I?"

"Oh no, indeed not," she answered, with fervour.

"Well," he said, "I tell you one thing, Nurse Isabel, if I ever leave off writing history and take to fiction, I will put you into my first novel, a little idealised, perhaps, for the purposes of art, but true to the life, with the twenty-four buttons to fasten the dress at the back, and the regiment of dainty shoes under the dressing-table, and the stamp-album, and . . ."

"And my wonderful endurance," suggested Nurse Isabel, quaintly.

"And the chronic depression so invigorating to the patient's spirits," said Brian, good-naturedly. "And those famous nervous headaches, always coming on at the exact moment when the patient desired to be read to."

"But when the patient chooses deadly uninteresting books, what is the nurse to do to protect herself?"

asked Nurse Isabel. "I should certainly make a note of that in my first novel, if I were you. It is only fair, you know, to give two sides of the question."

"I will not forget," he answered. "But really I think I have teased you enough for to-day, Nurse Isabel. I am sorry, and you will forgive me when you see the rare stamps which I have been collecting for your album. Here they are."

"It is good of you to have thought of me," she said, looking at them with genuine pleasure. "As for being vexed with what you have said, I don't mind what you say or what you do, provided you don't have another relapse. I really cannot stand that; but anything else I am prepared to meet with perfect equanimity."

"But," she added, with more kindness than was her wont, "you have talked quite enough, and you will be getting tired. Shall I read to you out of the geography book, or would you like to hear something more about Nora Penhurst, who has such a great admiration for your work?"

"Something of both," Brian said, "but begin with the girl."

"No, I think it better to begin with Arizona and the atlas," Nurse Isabel said, primly. "It is more composing for your nerves!"

She had risen from the chair by his sofa, and had reached out her hands for the two books, and then turned to him half in jest and half in earnest.

"Perhaps I have not been very patient," she said. "But when you put me into your novel, make some excuses for me, and don't forget to mention, that in two years I have nursed three philosophers, three poets, one painter, and five successful writers, including yourself. The last philosopher nearly drove me distracted: he was

so terribly afraid that he would not live long enough to finish his last volume of Synthetic something or other. Of course he did live. Those people always do, just as you will. And, of course, he finished his last volume, and began another last one. I knew he would. He was the first person to impair my patience. Well, I am sorry. And now for Arizona and New Mexico."

Then she read to him, and, with saintlike patience, found all the places on the map, and as she glanced at him from time to time, she began to feel an awakening pleasure in his company. She remembered suddenly how forbearing he had sometimes been with her when she was at her worst, and a new feeling sprang up in her mind. And she recalled what Nora had said about nurses, and how they should be honoured as the guardians of the nation, and she told Brian.

"I think so too," he said, gently. "Everything should be done to make their lives easy and honoured."

"You make me feel ashamed," she said, laughing a little uneasily. "But perhaps you know I am not a good specimen."

"Perhaps I know in my heart of hearts that I am a bad specimen of the other genus," he said. "And now tell me some more about Miss Penhurst."

So Nurse Isabel told him once more about the meeting with Nora on the moors, and she said:

"Women are supposed not to be able to admire their own sex. But that is not true, you know; anyway, I admire her very much, and I felt from the first moment I saw her, that I would try to win her friendship. She is a gallant-looking creature."

"She did wonders for you, Nurse Isabel," he said. "You have been surprisingly good-tempered since you met her."

"Perhaps she will do wonders for you," Nurse Isabel replied. "You remember she is coming to read to you one day soon."

"I hope it will be very soon," he said. "It will be so delightful to meet some one who is good enough to appreciate my efforts in the History book direction! It will quite brace me up. Appreciation is a wonderful tonic."

He lay there, with a quiet smile of content on his face; and it was a delightful face, of rare distinction and refinement, with eyes which, looking out on the world, surely saw the beautiful things of the world, and with a mouth which hid in its corners a lurking suspicion of humour. But there was an expression of great sadness on his face, and he still looked frail. He had been suffering at first from typhoid fever, and then from a long and severe nervous illness, brought on by a terrible calamity which had befallen him in the Swiss mountains. He and his dearest friend and comrade went out together with the guide, and were lost. Brian was the only one of the three found and rescued, and for some time it seemed doubtful whether he would keep his reason. His grief for his friend was piteous. Just at the time of the accident the first part of the 'Intellectual Evolution of Europe' was published, and began at once to attract attention. It was hoped that this would help him back to health, and no doubt it would have done so, but that just when he was raising his head, another great grief overtook him: his little step-sister Thyra died quite suddenly at college in the country. She was only eighteen years old, being twenty-one years younger than himself, and he had been brother and father and mother to her. She was a clever girl, and he was intensely proud of her abilities and her personality; and as she was the only

relative he had, his whole life was bound up in hers. One day he had received the news of her brilliant success in her examination, and the next day he started off to see her; and when he reached Cherbury, he heard she had died that very morning from some internal rupture. She had died before the doctor could be fetched to her. Brian stood stunned, and quite incredulous.

"Thyra is so strong," he said. "The thing is simply impossible."

But for all that she had died; and meanwhile the fame of his book went on increasing, and, young man as he was, he seemed to have won a place of distinction amongst modern thinkers. But his friends saw with disappointment that he took very little interest in the recognition which had come to him. When he spoke of it at all it was with the cool unconcern of a spectator, and when people spoke to him of it, he shrank back as though something had wounded him. Letters of praise from many eminent men reached him; and from the Continent, too, came pleasing signs of appreciation. But not even the German translation of his work moved him to enthusiasm. He stood, a solitary figure, reached, apparently, by none of the warm influences around him, and not caring for his honours, since he now had no one with whom to share them. So he drifted, now gathering himself together and trying to write once more, and now turning away from his work, which seemed to tax him too greatly, and always full of fears that he had lost his abilities, and that he would never be able to continue his History. This, together with his loneliness, preyed so much on his mind that he broke down completely. When many remedies had been tried, and proved of no avail, many changes prescribed, and all to no purpose, the doctor suggested the rest cure, and chose Nurse Isabel as

a suitable and soothing person to administer it. One of the masters at Harrow, who was taking his family on the Continent for the summer holidays, offered him the use of the Moat House, near Graystoke; and as the country was both beautiful and bracing, Brian decided to accept this kindness.

So Nurse Isabel nursed him at the Moat House, and slowly but surely he came back to life and strength and courage.

CHAPTER X

ATTRACTION AND REPULSION

ROGER PENHURST did not take kindly to Theodore Bevan, his fellow-lodger at the King's Head, and sought sympathy from Mrs Mary Shaw, who enthusiastically shared his dislike; and neither the one nor the other could understand what Nora found so attractive in his companionship. At first her father teased her about her new acquaintance, whom with characteristic appropriateness he had christened the "centipede"; but when he found that she became quite touchy on the subject, a most unusual departure for her, and that any depreciatory remarks of his always called forth warm words of defence from Nora, he gave up all fun and criticism where Theodore Bevan was concerned, and just waited, quite confident that his dear girl would soon come round to his way of thinking. The curious part of it was, that Theodore Bevan, who constantly saw Roger Penhurst at the King's Head, and sometimes spoke with him about passing events, never once referred to Nora, though of course it was no secret that he visited her at the Castle, went for walks with her in which her father once or twice joined, and took tea with them whenever he wished it. But his presence was nearly always an illness to the genial old man, whilst at other times, in spite of himself, he could not help being attracted towards the little stranger, who knew well how to make himself agreeable when he chose, and possessed the virtue, much appreciated by the old, of being a good

listener. Roger Penhurst had lived through a long life, had plenty to say, liked saying it, and liked being listened to with a profound attention granted by the very few. It was silent flattery, all the more eloquent because of its silence, and at first it conciliated the old man's reluctance; but always after the short spell of attraction came the lengthened period of repulsion; and when his dislike was at its strongest, it invariably happened that Theodore Bevan arrived in the nick of time, and succeeded in removing, by means of some special attentive act, some specially unfavourable impression. It was as though he possessed a curious power of divination, and realised when any one was thinking harshly of him. Mrs Shaw told Roger Penhurst that her little lodger often put himself to trouble to help her, just at the very minute when she was most desiring to send him flying out of the King's Head and be rid of him, bag and baggage! Then she would be seized with a paroxysm of repentance and shame, and would try to coerce herself into liking him better.

"But it be of no use, dear Mr Penhurst," she would say, almost pathetically; "I can't abide the little viper man."

Theodore Bevan never spoke to Nora of her father, and although it was her habit to be constantly talking of him, the little stranger invariably remained silent, as we do when some one is giving us an account of a person in whom we are not interested. And then he immediately passed on to some other subject. He seemed to have made up his mind that, so far as he was concerned, Nora and her father had nothing whatever to do with each other — were, in fact, isolated people, whom force of circumstances had brought together for the moment; and by his manner to them when both were present, he

certainly assumed that they had not had any previous acquaintance. This, no doubt, sounds absurd, considering the tender intimacy which did exist between father and daughter, and the good understanding so apparent between them; but it is nevertheless true that this was Theodore Bevan's attitude. Nora noticed it at the onset, and was greatly amused.

"I really wonder that he does not offer to introduce us to each other every time we are together," she thought. "I think I shall suggest it."

So one day she said:

"I really wonder that you do not offer to introduce me to my father."

"I am afraid I do not understand you," he said, innocently.

"Why, I mean that you seem to assume we are strangers," Nora answered.

"Indeed, I was not aware," he answered in a surprised tone of voice. "I suppose it is that I am not accustomed to take relationships into account. They have never impressed themselves on my mind as being important."

But he did not change his manner, which continued to amuse and irritate Nora according to her mood at the time; just as the very way in which he had taken possession of her from the beginning, tickled her fancy at one moment, and annoyed her at another. He seemed, also, to have assumed that she always desired his presence, whether she was alone or with her father; and if, by any chance, he was prevented from seeing her, he wrote a letter in which he expressed regret at being unable to pay the daily visit. He generally entrusted this note to Wullie, together with a book, which no doubt was intended to make up for her dis-

appointment in being deprived of his society. And strangely enough, when she did not see him, though she pretended to herself to be glad that she was free of him, she missed him. She looked out longingly for his eccentric little figure, and cheated herself into believing that she rejoiced not to see it. Long afterwards, in thinking the whole matter over, she realised that if only she could have spoken of him to some one, and more especially to her father, she would have been able to shake off his influence. But she always found that she never could speak of him; several times she began, and all the attempts ended in failure. She simply could not discuss him, even with herself, though his way of looking at life, and his many bitter and cruel remarks, so often called forth her indignation, which must necessarily have drawn her into sympathy with others who were observing him with unfavourable eyes. He had no belief in love and none in friendship, but he did not say this in so many words; and it was only from the tone of his conversation that she realised that his pessimism was not an affectation: it was an affliction with which he must have been born.

He told her once that he took great pleasure in analysing people's actions and motives.

"Given any action," he said, "find the originating motives: a most interesting occupation."

"You ought to have been a detective," she said. "Perhaps you are one?"

"Perhaps I ought to have been one," he answered, grimly. "But a hobby loses its charm when it becomes a profession."

"What a mind you must have," she answered, "to find satisfaction in such paltriness for its own sake."

"I think I have never claimed to be anything

better or worse than the average person," he replied. "Average people are invariably paltry; they correspond with the small shop-keeping community in the social organism."

He did not bear her any grudge when she criticised his sentiments, as she frequently did at the beginning of their intercourse, whilst she was still retaining her own individuality. On the contrary, he showed a singular sweetness and humility which could not but flatter Nora, for she was thus made to feel that she was influencing him. She was flattered, too, by his strong determination to have as much of her companionship as he possibly could. He showed her no personal attentions beyond what was required by the code of strictest courtesy; and he had never even touched her hand. There was not the slightest approach to familiarity in his manner towards her, and yet there was a quiet freedom of bearing, which appealed to Nora all the more because she felt that it was entirely impersonal; but she reflected that she would not have liked it from her young men friends in the old days of fun and frivolity. But she liked it in Theodore Bevan; it seemed an outcome of his mysterious self. He made no attempt to flatter her by speech either; he always spoke disparagingly of University training and honours, assuming invariably that she agreed with him, and that she too did not place any value on her Classical Tripos and her other qualifications.

"You would not talk like that if you had won them yourself," Nora said, with a good deal of spirit, one day. "It is so easy to depreciate what other people do, but what you yourself cannot do. It is a delightful way of being superior."

But he continued to make slighting remarks about University education, and about people who had been

brought up within the narrow confines of the study, and who, coming out into the world, were armed with about as much real knowledge as that of an ordinary babe. Nora thought of the Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and the Professor of History at Oxford, and of the many distinguished scholars with whom she had come in contact, and she smiled down in cold contempt at her paltry little stranger.

"You are simply jealous," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Ah, you have hurt me," he said, as though in sudden pain. And then he left her, and she, seeing the look of suffering on his face, was remorseful that she had wounded him.

So the days passed, and the autumn tints crept over the foliage. On the moors, where Nora and her father and Theodore Bevan walked, now alone and now together, the heather and the gorse still spread a gorgeous carpet. At the King's Head, the ancestors went on worrying, Mr. William Parrington continued to pay his addresses to Mrs. Mary Shaw, and the little stranger sat up half the night writing mysterious records in his mysterious journal. Roger Penhurst played the organ in the church; and the beautiful old Grancino violoncello was carried there by David the blacksmith, and the old man touched the strings and awakened the very soul of the instrument, whilst Nora stood by listening to the melodies she loved so well—the Boccherini Andante and other plaintive, old-world Italian fragments, heard always at their best in a church by twilight. Theodore Bevan came to listen too, but on these occasions Nora steadily ignored him; he did not care for music, according to his own confession, and she felt as though he spoilt her pleasure by being present. She said as much to him, but he persisted

in coming. Nurse Isabel met him there for the first time, and when she went back to the Castle to take tea with Nora, she found him already installed in the gate-house. They looked at each other, these two, and declared war instantly.

"What a horrid little worm!" Nurse Isabel said to Nora when they were alone. "He is not fit to dust your shoes. I should not even let him touch mine, and you are a thousand times better than I am."

The next morning Theodore Bevan said to Nora:

"What an objectionable person you invited to your rooms yesterday. It grieved me to see you on such easy terms with her."

CHAPTER XI

THE HISTORIAN AWAKES

THEODORE BEVAN sent a letter one afternoon to say that he would not be able to pay his daily visit, and it so happened that Nora's father had gone to spend the whole day at the neighbouring town of Langton, an interesting old-world place with a ruined abbey. He had invited her to come with him, and suggested slyly that they should steal away quite alone.

"We will not tell a soul except David, who will lend us his trap," he said, coaxing like a school-boy. "We will have one of our splendid outings, such as I have taught you to enjoy, my Nora; and we will eat our dinner at the oldest inn, see over the church, and then go on to the abbey. And I will smoke one of my best cigars, and we won't breathe a word to a soul. 'We will fold our tents like the Arabs, and as silently steal away.'"

"I don't think I care to go, father," she said. "Another day. I feel in what Mr Bevan would call a 'non-receptive mood.'"

"Oh, damn Mr Bevan!" her father said, brusquely. "Is a man like that going to come between you and me?"

He was standing on the drawbridge leading up to the gate-house, and, as he spoke, he walked quickly away until he reached the end of the drawbridge, and then as quickly walked back again to Nora.

"I am sorry I damned Mr Bevan," he said. "I'm

a cross old fellow. I was so disappointed. That is all."

"Oh, father," Nora said, with tears in her eyes, "I was not thinking of what I was saying. Forgive me, and let me come with you after all."

"Some other time," Roger Penhurst answered, gently. "I think I will go alone to-day."

So he went alone, but Nora would have given anything to have jumped into David's gig at the last moment, and put her arm tightly into her father's arm. But for the first time in her life she felt shy of him; he had dismissed her, and she had deserved it.

She was restless during the whole morning. She started for a walk over the moors, but came home again. She tried to correct examination papers, and gave the task up as hopeless. She strolled down to the river, and turned back unsatisfied. She watched great-uncle's sheep being branded, and, tiring of that, she went into one of the large fields at the back of the King's Head, and watched the threshing-machine. Wullie and another boy stood feeding the hungry creature. Then she moved on to the field beyond, and talked for a few mimutes with the thatcher, who was busy at work on an enormous hay-rick, which was the pride of Mrs Mary Shaw's heart. And there stood the hostess of the King's Head gazing at it triumphantly.

"Ah," she said, as she turned to Nora. "Parrington ain't got nothing that like. Why, Miss Nora dear, I do declare you be looking dumpsy."

"I *am* rather miserable to-day," Nora said, smiling sadly. "Father went off without me, and it was all my fault. We had a few words about — about Mr Bevan."

"Ah," said Mrs Mary Shaw, "he don't like that little viper gentleman any more than I does."

"I cannot see what people find in him to dislike so much," Nora said, a little sharply; and she went on her way to the Castle. Mrs Shaw looked for some minutes after the retreating figure.

"Dear Miss Nora be wearing her apron over her face to-day," she said to herself.

In the afternoon Nora determined to pay a visit to the Moat House, and make the acquaintance of Nurse Isabel's patient. She had seen Nurse Isabel several times since their meeting on the moors, and she would have gone there before, but that she seemed to have had no opportunity. Theodore Bevan took up a great deal of her time. When she arrived at the Moat House she lingered outside to take stock of the fine old Elizabethan building and the older portion with its fourteenth century gate. She glanced at the wonderful yew hedge, dating back to the time of Henry VIII., and at the three quaint pleasaunces; and she stood on the lawn and looked at the blue hills in the distance. It was a beautiful spot, and she felt soothed.

"Father must come here," she thought.

Then Nurse Isabel touched her on the arm.

"Do not waste another moment looking at the scenery," she said, brightly. "Scenery is all very well in its way, but you have come at the exact time to relieve a human being's misery. My afflicted historian is utterly miserable to-day, and has had a bad relapse. Nothing can cheer him up, not even the geography book. I am sick and tired of him, even though he *has* vastly improved these last days. Do go and sit with him, and see what you can do. Tell him you admire his work tremendously, even if you don't."

"But I do," said Nora, laughing.

"Well, it is of no consequence what you feel, pro-

vided you praise him," said Nurse Isabel. "I rather think he needs a little praise. I find it very difficult to flatter these people, but they all want it in the long run. How glad I am you have come! It is good to see you."

There was a note of real kindness and welcome in her voice, and Nora heard it and answered to it in her own friendly manner. The two women walked up the path together, and Nurse Isabel began speaking of Theodore Bevan.

"That is a strange little man," she said. "I know the type well. I am too much a woman of the world not to recognise a good man when I see him. He is not a good man. I cannot get him out of my mind. I dreamed of him for two nights after I had seen him. We didn't take to each other, I fancy. Indeed, he looked at me as though he wished to order my instant execution. I wonder he didn't! Do tell me what he said of me."

Nora laughed a little uneasily.

"Oh," she said, "it was only that he did not seem to approve of you any more than you of him."

"Ah, you won't tell me," Nurse Isabel answered. "Well, the worst he can say of me is that I am a ridiculous and vain woman, and rather underbred in spite of my pose of refinement. But I am not bad-hearted, Miss Penhurst. And that is just what he is."

Nora's answer approached nearer to a criticism than any remark she had yet made concerning Theodore Bevan.

"He has a curious effect on me," she said, dreamily: "a different effect at different times. But he nearly always makes me feel as though my own soul did not belong to myself."

Nurse Isabel was discreetly silent, and they entered

the hall of the Moat House, and mounted the spacious staircase, Nurse Isabel pointing out two or three fine old pictures on the wall.

"Now," she said, "I shall take you into my historian's room, and leave you to yourselves, and I shall go and write some letters and read a novel sent me this morning by a Captain in the Hussars, one of my former patients. It will be a real holiday for me."

She opened a door, and they went into a cheerful room, where Brian Uppingham was sitting in an easy-chair drawn up to the window and commanding a fine view of the country.

Nora came forward with an easy frankness all her own.

"How delightful that I am allowed to come and see the famous historian!" she said, with her sunny smile.

Her voice fell like music on his ear. Her presence broke upon him like a flood of sunshine.

"How delightful it is that you have been willing to come!" he said, with a sudden thrill in his whole being. And his heart went out to her instantly.

"Moreover, she has chosen the right day," said Nurse Isabel, quaintly, "a day when even the geography-book and the Standard Atlas have not had their usual exhilarating effect."

They all laughed, and Nurse Isabel went to her own domains.

"Nurse Isabel has not a very high opinion of my cheerfulness," Brian said, turning to Nora. "And it is true enough that I have been singing a monotonous song in a minor key."

"You have had a long illness," Nora said. "When you are stronger in body, your spirit will mend itself too. And then you will go back to work, and finish your History."

"Ah, that is just it!" he answered, eagerly. "I seem to have lost confidence in myself, and do not feel as though I could ever write again. Sometimes I dream that the old power and pleasure have come back, and I wake up reinvigorated and full of ambitious determination, and then in a moment the paralysing doubts seize me. And I am not by nature a miserable fellow. I suppose it is simply because I have no one who cares greatly what I do or do not do."

"You have no one to work for?" she asked.

"No one," he answered. "And no one to care whether I succeed or fail."

"But you yourself would care," she said. "And surely, there is the joy of the work itself. That must count, even though you may think it does not."

"Oh, it counts, I suppose," he said. "But a career is not everything. It may be one's bread — but it can also be a stone."

"I think you must be a little ungrateful," she said. "Some men strive and fail — but you have striven and succeeded."

"Ah, I am not really ungrateful," he said. "But nothing has seemed to reach me since I lost, first my friend, and then my little sister. I have felt as though I were merely a spectator of some one else's success: the very letters which came to me seemed as though written to any one else except me. And when you have been, as it were, a silent spectator for many months, it is not a very easy matter to step on to the stage, and confidently take up your part in the drama.

"But," he added, smiling brightly, "I am already working my way back again to life and sunshine. Even Nurse Isabel says I am not quite as dull as I was a fortnight ago. That means a great deal from her, you

know. I sometimes think that if she could have managed to get up a little sympathy for me, I might have gathered myself together quicker."

He spoke half-humorously, but there was a ring of pathos in his voice; and Nora, glancing at him, felt the strange irony of the situation: here was a man whom many unknown admirers would have been only too glad to help back to health and ease of mind and spirit, and yet perverse fate had only given him a Nurse Isabel. But she did not speak a word of what passed through her mind. He did not need pity: he needed a little understanding and generous appreciation. The man was starved. So she spoke to him about his book, which she and her father had carefully studied. She had an excellent memory, and she was able to refer to some of the chapters and one or two of the passages, over which she became sincerely enthusiastic.

"With such an interpreter as you are," she said, "the history of thought and action takes on new life, sheds new light on the past, and is a torch for the future. I do not wonder at the welcome you have received. All those who study and think, were waiting for you. All I wonder at is that you yourself do not care more. If I were you, Mr Uppingham, my heart 'would leap to the glorious day.'"

"It does," he said, eagerly. "You have made it!"

"Don't you see," she continued, "that power like yours is one of God's greatest gifts; and that the consciousness of such power ought to save you, and everyone like you, from sinking into the apathy of despair? Nothing can take it from you except death, when you leave it behind for us."

Then she looked at him, and a beautiful white-crested wave of sympathy went from her towards him; and

when it had passed, she was conscious of what she had been saying, and became confused.

"But it is presumptuous of me to talk to you like this," she said, gathering herself together — "venturing to praise you, who have received so much praise — venturing — "

"Ah," he said, interrupting, "your words are like a river in a dry land: refreshing the weary spirit by its music, and renewing the pulse of life by its clear strong waters."

They were silent for a time; then she took up a book, and offered to read to him.

"No, no," he said. "Tell me something about yourself instead."

So, without any preliminaries, she told him about her picturesque lodgings in the gate-house, and about Mrs Mary Shaw and Mr William Parrington, and all the ancestors. And she spoke of her dear old father and her happy companionship with him, and of her teaching and her holidays, and those everlasting examination papers over which she had dawdled so shamefully, that she would now be obliged to shut herself up in her room and "put pressure" on herself for a couple of days. She smiled as she involuntarily used Theodore Bevan's favourite expression, and for a moment her thoughts turned uneasily to him. But when she glanced at the bright, eager face lifted so confidently to hers, the phantom of the little stranger with the broad eye-glass ribbon melted away at once, and she went on speaking freely of her teaching and of her life at Grantham College; and as he seemed so interested in everything she said, she told him about some of her friends there who had been at school with her previously, and had moved on to Grantham at the same time as herself.

"Yes," she said, delighted to speak of her schooldays. "We all came up from Cherbury College together, where we were ridiculously happy. The lady who kept our schoolhouse had a theory that if we were not happy there, we should lose all chance of happiness hereafter. She did not like to see us overworking either; but I must say I never bothered her in that respect."

"That is where my little sister was," Brian said. "Cherbury! And you were there too? Ah, how glad I am that we can talk together of the place!"

"Not now," she said, kindly, for she knew of the trouble which had befallen him. "We will speak of Cherbury some day when you are less tired."

"No — now," he answered, insistingly; and Nora gave way and let him ease his heart. He drew from his book a photograph of the Great Hall, and showed her where his sister had her desk. He was delighted when Nora was able to identify her own place.

"I was so very proud of her," he said. "She was such a splendid little girl, and had the pluck of ten in her; and she would have made a capital mountaineer in time. I and my friend whom I lost in the mountains had been planning to take her with us to Switzerland the next year, when she would have finished her London Matriculation; but, you see, things turned out differently from what we expected."

He paused, and Nora was silent too.

"We had arranged that she should be a doctor," he continued, proudly. "All her interests were in that direction, and I had always intended, of course, that she should have a profession or trade. Ah! we had the happiest life together — she and I and my friend John Graham. He was with us most of the time; and when

she came back from college there was not a jollier trio in the world than we three."

"Poor fellow!" Nora said, gently. "And now you are alone."

"Well," he said, "it has been balm to my heart to speak of them to you. I felt that I could, and that I might. One knows by instinct with whom one must be silent, and to whom one may let oneself go."

At that moment Nurse Isabel came strolling into the room.

"Well," she said, genially, "and have you made friends, or have you been quarrelling over the political aspect in the reign of King Thomas à Becket?"

CHAPTER XII

THE ANCESTORS GIVE TROUBLE

One morning all the ancestors woke up in bad tempers. Mrs Mary Shaw also woke up in a bad temper, and was therefore unable to make allowances for the irritating peculiarities of the three previous generations. Great-great-aunt, Miss Rebeccah Renaldson, made several spiteful allusions to Mr William Parrington, and complained, in addition, that every day she was being neglected more and more.

"That's what comes of being old," she grumbled. "The young don't take no notice of the old. Not that you are particular young," she added, quickly. "You're aging wonderful quick."

Great-uncle, too, was quite out of sorts. He had broken his favourite clay-pipe, and was discovered on the bench in front of the King's Head, swearing without interruption, and reading the Lamentations of Jeremiah upside down. It probably made but little difference which position he chose for the sacred volume; for he had been over to the Miners' Tavern, and consumed considerably more spirituous liquor than was advisable for a gentleman of eighty-four years. (He did not give his custom to the King's Head, having more belief in the excellence of the beverages supplied by another house, and feeling, no doubt, more independence in being at a distance from Mrs Mary Shaw's watchful supervision.) In addition to this escapade, he had insisted on doing a little carpentering; and having mistaken his finger for a

piece of wood, had inflicted injuries which might have been serious. It was a remarkable fact that he was always seized with a feverish desire to work at the carpenter's bench whenever he had paid a visit to the Miners' Tavern. Mrs Mary Shaw was rather impatient with him, and told him she was ashamed of him for going and getting too much to drink, and then nearly cutting his finger off.

"No respectable old gentleman of eighty-four does such things," she said, sternly.

"There's not many at eighty-four as can do 'em, Mary Shaw," he answered, rebelliously; and there he continued to sit, reading his Bible upside down and swearing quietly.

Reuben too, her gentle old father, was quite different from his usual dreamy self. It appears that he had collected some special herbs on which he set great store, and which he intended to convert into some infallible remedy for rheumatism, or typhoid fever, or toothache — it did not matter which, and Wullie had thrown them away; whether deliberately or accidentally was not quite clear to any one, and even Wullie himself did not seem to know.

Reuben, in his indignation, said so many angry things against Wullie that Mrs Mary Shaw's mother's heart rose up in rebellion against her father, and she took a somewhat contemptuous view of his loss.

"Valuable herbs, indeed," she said, scornfully. "Anything would do just as well for them rotten medicines. You can have as much cabbage or turnip from the garden as you please."

Reuben's pride was wounded, and he remained deeply injured for the whole of the day, and refused to eat. Mrs Shaw was always worked up when people lost their

appetites — she expected them to give up the ghost immediately; so she coaxed him with several dainties, including buttered toast, a special fancy of his; but nothing tempted him, and he was heard to murmur to himself several times:

"Cabbage and turnip, indeed, ignorant idiot!"

It was at the close of this stormy day that Mr William Parrington arrived at the King's Head, and found Mrs Shaw in one of her dejected moods.

"What's gone wrong?" asked the host of the Punch-bowl, lighting his pipe.

"Oh, it's them ancestors been giving trouble," answered Mrs Shaw.

"Blast them, I say!" remarked Mr Parrington, thumping his fist on his knee.

Mrs Shaw nodded her head approvingly, and seemed relieved.

"Great-uncle took too much to drink and nearly cut his finger off," she said.

"Pity he didn't cut his neck off and have done with it!" suggested Parrington.

"Father lost some of them silly herbs of his, and flew into a temper; and because I said turnips would do as well, he settled down into the sulks and won't eat," said Mrs Shaw. "He'll fall ill and die, and I'll never raise my head no more."

"People don't die of the sulks," remarked Parrington, philosophically. "All the sulky folk I ever knew, lived a terrible long time. Sulks is a sort of life-preserver."

"Great-great-aunt complains she's neglected," said Mrs Shaw, who was visibly cheering up; "she says all old persons be neglected and pushed on one side, and that I put too much salt in her broth, and that I'm aging wonderful quick."

"Nasty, spiteful old cuss!" said Mr Parrington, with fervour. "If she couldn't get rid of her spitefulness at ninety-three year old, it don't say much for the beauty of old age, do it? And as for you aging wonderful quick, I never saw you look younger in your life; you might be Wullie's sister in place of his mother."

"Oh, Mr Parrington!" interposed Mrs Shaw, much gratified.

"The other day when I was in Langton," said Parrington, confidentially, "I was just taking a look round at the jewellers' shops, when I see this mighty nice little ring."

"It wouldn't fit *my* finger, Parrington," said Mrs Mary Shaw, smiling.

"I never told you I bought it for your finger," answered Mr Parrington. "I thought it might do for a lady friend of mine in Liverpool. She wouldn't refuse it, I can tell you."

"Then I'd send it to her," suggested Mrs Shaw, still smiling. "It ain't pleasant having a gift refused, is it?"

"I'm pretty well hardened to that," said Parrington, glancing at her mischievously. "You've taught me. Why, I've offered to you the best gift a man can offer—hisself, and you've refused me nineteen times."

"I'm not sure, Mr Parrington, that the best thing a man can offer *is* himself," said Mrs Mary Shaw. "It all depends on the man. I don't think much of men, though there is one or two nice exceptions — Miss Nora's father, and Cousin Susie's husband in Yarmouth; though now I come to remember, he broke out into religion lately; so that only leaves Miss Nora's father and —"

"And me!" said Parrington, pleadingly.

"Well, upon my soul, I think you're right," replied Mrs Shaw, laughing.

"Then you'll wear the engagement ring?" said Parrington, triumphantly. "It will fit the little finger. Now don't be like your ancestors, always giving trouble."

"I can't think of wearing it until you've bought another just like it for your lady friend in Liverpool," answered Mrs Mary Shaw, who now seemed in excellent spirits, and had forgotten all the worries of a particularly trying day.

"I'll soon square that matter," said Parrington. "Here, now, my dear, just slip it on!"

He might perhaps have succeeded in coaxing the obstinate hostess of the King's Head, but that a trap drove up to the inn and Mrs Shaw bustled out to see who her guest might be. Her face fell when she found it was only Theodore Bevan. She had forgotten he was coming back that evening.

"I have had my supper," he said, without looking at her. "I desired to save you the trouble."

"*Save me the trouble!*" she repeated, when she came into the kitchen again. "That's what he's always doing, the little horror. I can't abide him, Parrington. And I've no reason for it. He pays regular, and gives no trouble. I thought a deal more of that artist-chap last year, who never paid a penny, and ate five meals a-day. How he did enjoy them, to be sure!"

"Well," answered Parrington, "that's always the way. We always likes best the folk who give us the most trouble. There's yourself, Mrs Mary Shaw. That be a very good instance!"

CHAPTER XIII

A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

"So you have made the acquaintance of the historian," Theodore Bevan said, as he watched Nora working at some embroidery which seemed to be engaging a great deal of her attention. He found her in a "non-receptive mood" this afternoon, and wondered what he could do or say to arouse her interest.

"Yes, I have made his acquaintance," Nora answered, without looking up. Indeed, he was pervading all her thoughts, and as she spoke of him, she flushed.

After that Theodore Bevan remained perfectly silent, smoked his cigarette, and leaned back comfortably in the arm-chair.

"Personally, I consider his work very uninteresting," said Bevan, after a pause. "Of course, I do not say that there are not some remarkable chapters in his History: that chapter, for instance, on the Reformation; but on the whole, I think the book is a failure. He has not sufficient grasp to handle such a great theme. He should keep to short historical sketches. He does those well. There he is within his limits."

"You seem very decided in your opinions," Nora remarked, a little irritated.

"I have a very strong belief in my own opinions," he answered. "And I have reason for it. You know I have trained myself to observe, to think, to analyse, to put together, and to conclude. I can remember beginning the process when I was quite a small boy,

and of course, as the years went on, I perfected my system."

"But," said Nora, "a man may be a good analytical chemist, or a good detective, without being a good critic."

"Quite possibly," he said, casually. "But he may also be all three."

He relapsed into silence, and seemed engrossed in his own thoughts.

"I had a desolate kind of boyhood," he said, after another long spell of quiet, "and I don't know why I am thinking of it specially to-day, except that I am a good deal impressed with your father's personality. A temperament like his is a gift from the gods, but for all that, it could only have developed in a congenial and fostering environment. And then I think of my own early environment."

This was the first time Theodore Bevan had ever spoken of himself, and Nora's curiosity was aroused at once. His voice, always pleasing to the ear, sounded unusually melodious, and his face wore an expression of intense sadness.

"My mother and father were indifferent to each other," he continued, "and quite casual about me. My mother did not take the slightest interest in anything, and my father certainly never knew anything at all about what your father calls '*the wine of life*.' I don't remember a single word of enthusiasm ever passing their lips. They belonged to that large section of English middle-class life, where enthusiasm is considered a deplorable want of suitable self-control, and emotions of any sort are regarded as disturbing discords in the every-day regulation dulness. They amused me greatly, and puzzled me too; they had no pleasure in each other's

society, and there was constant nagging and fault-finding on both sides; but when the anniversary of the engagement and wedding day came round, they suddenly conjured up a small quantity of false sentimentality, which just lasted for the two days. I used sometimes to think that it could not possibly hold out to the very end, but it always did. I had no one to whom I could speak of these and other things, and so I meditated over them alone, and they sank into my system. If I could have spoken of them, I should have freed myself from them only too gladly: any child would, and every grown-up person. But I had not the chance. So it was in this way that I learned to observe and analyse, and put together and conclude. Now, compare my early environment with the surroundings which a man like your father must have had, and the influence of which he has certainly passed on to you. I have the right to envy you both, almost with hatred and uncharitableness in my heart. Why should such chances have been given to you and withheld from me? Sometimes when I talk with your father, I am overwhelmed with the rush of my own feelings. He attracts me — and of course I repel him. But I am accustomed to that. People in general do not like me, and I am not surprised at it: for you see, I never learnt anything about kindliness and tenderness, and I was brought up on mock sentimentality."

Nora was listening intently: she had not expected this kind of language from Theodore Bevan.

"But," he added, "I can generally work through this period of dislike when I choose, and when it is worth while to make the effort. Many things in life are not worth troubling about, but some are, and we are fools and faint-hearted if we let them slip: fools indeed, if

we do not strain every nerve, and fight through all our inherent disadvantages in order to attain to them. And if you have been starved and cheated in your youth, as I have been, you will feel that you are owed some compensation for all you have missed, and that you have the right to make straight for what seems to you a real satisfaction. And the greater your former destitution, the stronger your determination to *pay yourself back*. People may stand by, and wonder and criticise and sneer: but you can pass them by without a sign and without a word, for they do not come into your scene of action; so far as you are concerned, they might not exist. No doubt they have their significance in some other scheme, but that is of no moment to you."

His words, spoken so deliberately and coldly, sent a chill through Nora's heart. She knew by instinct that he intended her to understand that he had sought her companionship *as one of his payments back*. Was it any great compliment, she thought, to be included in this man's horizon? Would it not be better and safer to have no significance whatever in his scheme of action? Some such remark rose to her lips, but she found herself unable to give it utterance; there was, however, a slight shrinking in her manner which did not escape Theodore Bevan's keen observation; and when he spoke again, the tension of his address had relaxed, and the incisive tones of his voice had lost their sharpness. He looked up at her, and smiled sadly.

"I think I become an undesirable comrade when I speak of my childhood," he said. "I am carried away by my bitter sense of irreparable wrong. I must beg indulgence."

"You are indeed bitter," said Nora, slowly. "One wonders whether indulgence should be granted to you,

and on what grounds. One wonders, too, whether you should be allowed to pay yourself back in any way you choose, without consulting any one's wishes except your own."

"Ah," he said, "that is a question of individuality and relative strength."

He had risen from the chair, and stood before the fireplace, his hands behind him and his head slightly bowed, just as a child might stand who has been reproved and is ashamed.

"Each time I have been with you," he said, almost pleadingly, "I have come away feeling softened, and with some of the soreness healed. It could not have been otherwise. Each time I have left you, whether here, or in the woods, or on the moors, the same words have rushed to my lips, and when alone, I have spoken them aloud. Do not judge me harshly, for you have a great responsibility."

Then he stepped forward to Nora's writing-table, took two of his books which he had placed there, and passed quietly out of the room. Nora watched him from the casement-window, and turned away uneasily.

CHAPTER XIV

AN AFTERNOON AT THE EAGLE CLUB

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the members of the Eagle Club were making their way upstairs to the spacious new reception-rooms, open for the first time in honour of the President's return, after her long tour in the United States of America. She was tall and graceful, and had a refined face and a natural charm of manner which made itself felt at the very moment when you were brought into contact with her. The members of the Eagle Club were lucky in having secured her as their President, and she had carefully guarded them from making themselves ridiculous and rushing into extravagances of opinion and procedure. She herself did not pose, and therefore she did not gather around her any of the posing women of the day: they went and posed in a more congenial soil, whilst she attracted the real workers of the generation, who forgot their own individualities in their enthusiasms, and were not eternally sounding the personal note. She had around her, in fact, the younger women, many of whom had had the advantage of a systematic training, which usually results in some kind of self-restraint and reticence, and a better understanding of the proportion of things.

The rooms were quickly filling with members, most of whom had brought friends with them, chiefly women themselves, though here and there one might see the face of a man. The President, Mrs Carew, was surrounded by people all eager for an opportunity of wel-

coming her home to the dear old country. Although it was an informal social gathering, they very much wished her to say a few words to them about her travels and experiences; and she laughingly answered that she probably would not be able to help herself, since out in America she had become so accustomed to speaking on every occasion, whether suitable or unsuitable, that her difficulty now would be to recognise when to maintain a golden silence.

"Out in America, you know," she said, "all the women can speak well, and they do so on the slightest opportunity. They apparently must do so — it is greater than themselves!"

Whilst she was thus chatting in a further corner of the rooms, a few young women were standing round a little lady who had just come amongst them. She was slight and dark, and had soft brown eyes, but an exceedingly determined mouth, and a square jaw.

"Oh, I am delighted to be back in London," she was saying, "but, of course, I have had a most interesting time in Paris, and Sweden too. I worked very hard and happily in Paris over the gold tooling, and my master was a real old-world artist-craftsman. He was quite sentimental over his work, and could scarcely bear to part with the volumes which he had been binding and decorating. I don't wonder either. It is horrid to think that the books over which you have expended so much love and labour are going into some one else's library."

"Where shall you have your bindery, Miss Carson?" asked one of her listeners.

"In my own rooms, at present," she answered. "I have several private orders to carry out, and they will take me a long time. I am going to bind, according

to my own fancy, a whole set of Robert Browning's works for some rich old recluse in Somersetshire. Each volume is to be different."

"You are lucky to slip into work at once," said an elderly lady, with a sigh. "Some people try all their lives, and never get a fair chance."

"Or perhaps do not recognise when it comes," suggested some one else.

"Or perhaps are frightened to lay hold of it," said another.

At that moment a lady, followed closely by a gentleman, advanced to Madge Carson.

"Miss Carson," she said, "Mr. Gerald Hamilton desires greatly to make your acquaintance. He is himself much interested in bookbinding and would like to speak with you."

For one moment Madge Carson hesitated, but seeing the gentleman so near at hand, she bowed slightly, and began to talk with him, but as soon as she could free herself, she moved back to her former companions.

"I am rather surprised that you allowed yourself to be introduced to a man of such notorious character as Gerald Hamilton," said one of her friends. "I thought you felt strongly on all those matters."

"I am rather surprised that he is allowed to be present here," replied Madge Carson, warmly. "Being here, one has no right to insult him openly. But I shall make my complaint to the President at once. It is for her to deal with this matter, and not for me."

She wound her way through the maze of guests, stopping now and again to exchange a word with some one who recognised her bright face and pleasing appearance, and finally she found herself side by side with the President.

"Mrs. Carew," she said, quietly, "that odious man Gerald Hamilton is in the room, and, against all my wishes, of course, I had to be introduced to him. I thought you would like to know."

"Thank you," answered Mrs. Carew, just as quietly, and she continued her conversation with the Parsee lady who had taken such high honours in medicine at the London University. But after a few minutes she passed over to the corner where Gerald Hamilton was standing.

"Mr. Hamilton," she said, quite courteously, "I do not at present know at whose invitation you came amongst us to-day, but I think there must have been some mistake. We are trying the whole time to conduct the Club, as far as possible, on the same lines as one of the best Men's Clubs. I am quite sure that the gentlemen of the Bayard, for instance, would not care to admit to a social gathering of this description a woman of notorious character."

"May I ask who you are?" he asked, a little haughtily, but his dissipated face flushed crimson.

"I am the President of the Club," she answered. "Good afternoon, Mr. Hamilton."

She did not even wait to see whether he intended to take his departure, for she knew he had understood. He passed down the stairs slowly, and when out on the street, whistled a tune softly as he went along.

"Blessed are the women who don't make scenes," he said to himself; "for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven — and the world too. I congratulate the Club on its President."

Meanwhile Madge Carson had rejoined her little group of friends, and was keeping them entertained with her descriptions of her master the old Parisian

bookbinder; and when she looked up again she saw that Gerald Hamilton had gone.

"Now was not that much better than making a scene?" she asked. "The man has been dismissed quietly, I dare say even artistically. Men hate and despise scenes, but they adore tact. It is about the only virtue which people of Gerald Hamilton's stamp appreciate and respect. He has gone, you see, and no doubt he is thinking this very moment that the Club has a clever President."

"If that is all he is thinking of he has not learnt much from his dismissal," remarked one of the little circle.

"He has learnt that at least one section of modern educated women desire to have nothing to do with him," replied Madge Carson; "and if all the other sections would follow suit without any fuss, but just as a matter of course, then the Gerald Hamiltons of the world might perhaps begin to disappear. I only say perhaps. But even if there were merely a bare possibility, the experiment would be worth while."

Then, turning to her neighbour, she said: "Mrs Ellerton, do you remember my telling you how Theodore Bevan used to say that if you begin by assuming that certain things will take place, you have already given them the most important impetus? I always thought that so clever and true too. For instance, he deliberately assumed that people wanted his society, even if he saw that they did not. But they ended by wanting him. However, I was not specially wishing to speak of him, only the thought of him flashed across my mind when I was talking about this Gerald Hamilton. A man like Theodore Bevan can, on the whole, do much more harm to a young woman than Gerald Hamilton. At least you know where you are treading

with a disreputable fellow like that, for he really carries his own danger-signals with him; but a man of Theodore Bevan's type exercises from the very beginning a subtle influence over you, and you cannot ever get rid of it thoroughly."

"But you have freed yourself entirely from him now," her friend said to her, as she drew her apart from the others and scanned her; "and you are engaged to be married to our Prince of Bookbinders."

"Oh yes," Madge Carson answered, frankly. "And happiness has come to me like a revelation since then. I feel gloriously happy in my work, and in my engagement too. But an experience like mine with Theodore Bevan does leave its impress. Only the other day before I left Paris I was reading some of his letters, and wondering how on earth it was that I did not detect the note of insincerity and pretentiousness. I came across the words, '*As often as I leave you the same words always rise to my lips, and when alone I say them aloud.*' I used to think he uttered some kind of benediction for my chastening influence, but I suppose what he really said was, 'Idiotic little fool!'"

"It is curious that you should mention him to-day," said Mrs Ellerton; "for I heard of him only this morning, and was intending to speak of him to you. A friend of mine, Nora Penhurst, writes from the country that she has made the acquaintance of a very curious man called Theodore Bevan, and that she sees a good deal of him. I rather expected her to be at the Club to-day. She promised to come if she could, but she has evidently delayed her return to town. However, it cannot be long now before she does come back to London, for she teaches in several of the high schools. I should like you to know her."

"I would like to meet her, if only to put her on her guard about Theodore Bevan," Madge Carson answered. "You know I made a vow to myself at the time, that if ever I heard of any woman becoming intimate with him, nothing would prevent me from going to her, and begging her to save herself from the illness of having him in her life. I should not mind who it was, nor whom I encountered in the attempt."

"Nora Penhurst is not as young as you were at the time," her friend answered; "but she is singularly undeveloped in some ways, in spite of all her education and training. I sometimes think this is her great charm: she is so fresh-hearted and joyous, and sees beautiful things in the world where other people see nothing. But from her earliest days she has had a happy free life, and a splendid old father as a friend and comrade, and no relations, and indeed nothing to bother her, and no one to trample on her. She has always been a brick to me, and helped me over some difficult bits of my life. I wish I saw more of her now, but I am always travelling about. She sees so clearly in some things, and goes straight to the root of the matter; but in others she is as simple as a child."

"Well, I hope for her own sake that she will never get caught in the net of that cruel little fowler," Madge Carson said, bitterly. "Although I do not know anything about her, except that she is your friend, Mrs Ellerton, I would put myself to any indignity if I could warn her of her danger. Don't forget to arrange a meeting for us as soon as you can."

"Oh, there may be no need of a warning," said Mrs Ellerton.

"Ah, you do not know Theodore Bevan," Madge Carson replied, dreamily; and after that she did not

seem to care to speak to any one. She slipped away to her rooms in Chenies Street Chambers, and sat down to her work. But she did not accomplish anything; and when, later on in the evening, the man who loved her came to see her, bringing flowers in one hand, and exquisite new designs in the other, he found her listless and idle.

"What is it, dear little girl?" he asked, gently.

"A shadow on my soul," she answered, vaguely.

CHAPTER XV

KINDRED SPIRITS

"You certainly worked wonders during that afternoon you spent with my historian," said Nurse Isabel the next day when she met Nora at the post-office. "After you had gone, we talked of nothing but you — not that I minded that, you know. Still, I merely state that you *were* our sole topic of conversation. He dreamed about you, too, and awoke so happy and refreshed that I scarcely recognised him. But here comes the amusing part; he asked for pencil and paper and began making notes for his book. He said you had made him feel that he must begin at once."

"I am so glad to hear that," Nora said, smiling and blushing.

"But he began by putting down a few details about me, in case he should ever write a novel," continued Nurse Isabel, quaintly, "and from all I can gather, he thinks I am the most absurdly inane person that ever lived. Perhaps I am. But I am evidently considered interesting enough to be put into a book, and that is more than you can say of most people. He showed me his remarks, and asked me if I could supplement them. Now imagine anything as cold-blooded as that! He wrote: 'Nurse Isabel — ridiculously vain — but with some sense of fun — dress fastened at the back with twenty-four buttons — at least nine pairs of shoes — and a nervous headache for every day in the week — quite unsuited to be a nurse — rather bright at some

things — Grecian method of hair architecture — subject to depression which probably vanishes altogether given a congenial patient, but which seldom passes off if the invalid be not worthy of the effort.' There were other statements, too, and they ended with '*not bad-hearted.*'"

"Oh, I'm not angry," she added, good-naturedly. "But I am glad he wrote '*not bad-hearted.*' That is why I told you, for that is just as true as the other things he has said. And he knows.

"Not that he *could* write a character study about any living person, or about any dead one either, unless the individual came out of a history book," continued Nurse Isabel. "Do you know, that man spends hours and hours thinking about Queen Elizabeth and Oliver Cromwell and Louis XIV., and people of that description. Sometimes I say, 'What are you thinking of?' And he says, 'Cromwell.' Or perhaps he answers, 'Richelieu.' Or perhaps he will reply, 'Gustavus Adolphus.' But yesterday when I asked him my usual question, he did not refer to any historical personage. He said, 'I am thinking about that dear girl, Miss Penhurst. And if you are a brick, Nurse Isabel, you will ask her to come up here to-morrow.'"

Nora blushed again. A very warm and tender feeling came into her heart.

"I should like to come," she said, simply.

"Of course, you know," said Nurse Isabel, nodding her head approvingly, "if I were anything so base as a human being, I should instantly be jealous of you. When the stupid fellow recovered his senses, he ought to have fallen in love with me, to make up for all the dull time I've been having with him. Instead of which, he goes and loses his heart to you. And I am left out in the cold!"

"But you have never liked your poor historian," Nora said, laughing.

"But he is a changed man," Nurse Isabel answered. "However, I bear you no grudge. Do come this afternoon, if you can spare the time from that little friend of yours who likes me so much. I met him this morning near what you call the Nightingale Lane, and he again looked as though he wished to order my instant execution. I should not like to meet him on a lonely moor at night."

"I think he has just an unfortunate manner," Nora said.

"Oh, dear no," answered Nurse Isabel. "It is not his manner only. It is his mind."

"He has a very strong individuality," said Nora, uneasily. "One scarcely seems able to resist its influence. At times, when we have been together, and have disagreed about everything, and he has gone away, I find myself thinking his thoughts, not mine. . . . But. . . ."

She stopped and picked a flower from the hedge.

"Oh, I suppose it is just fancy," she said, with forced brightness.

"I should certainly hope it was," answered her companion. "Imagine a little worm like that treading on you!"

"Why do you dislike him so much?" asked Nora, with sudden irritation. "You know nothing of him. You have scarcely had five minutes' talk with him."

Nurse Isabel shrugged her shoulders.

"Instinct does not require five seconds," she said. "And although I am almost a stranger to you, I don't like to think of you being with him. You have drawn me to you, and I find I have a little fragment of tenderness left in me. I thought I had nursed it all away

long ago, but you have shown me that I was mistaken. When we feel like that, we put out our arms to protect. We cannot help ourselves."

Her voice was so unusually gentle that no one could have failed to detect the note of kindness; and Nora was touched. She slipped her arm through Nurse Isabel's, but she did not say another word about Theodore Bevan, and the two companions walked on together until they reached the church.

"Listen to my old father playing Bach's Fugues," Nora said. "You must bring Mr Uppingham down, and we will have some music."

"You can arrange with him this afternoon," Nurse Isabel said. "I think he will soon find himself strong enough to do anything you suggest. And I am sure he would like to see your father. What an old dear he is, Miss Penhurst! Ah, here he comes."

"Ah," said Roger Penhurst as he joined the two girls. "And here is the guardian of the nation too! Good-morning, Nurse. Wullie and I have been playing for such a long time on the organ that we are both worn out. I suppose you know something about medicine. What would you prescribe for this stricken boy? Peppermints or brandy balls?"

"Excellent remedies, both of them!" laughed Nurse Isabel.

"Go and get both of them, Wullie," the old man said, gravely, to the child, who went off delighted.

"And for myself?" Roger asked.

"I think it would do you good to walk home with me," Nurse Isabel suggested.

"I have not a doubt of it," he answered, gallantly.

"It does not look as though I were wanted," Nora said, as she left them. "I'll see you this afternoon,

Nurse Isabel, and perhaps father will come and fetch me."

"Don't you disappoint my poor historian," Nurse Isabel called after her. "He will have a relapse if you fail him. He is counting the hours till he sees you again."

Her words were spoken half-jestingly, as she intended, but they were nevertheless true. Brian Uppingham had brightened up wonderfully since Nora's visit: her presence, her manner, her personality had taken hold of him at once. He had been waiting for her — and her only; and when he saw her, he felt that she brought with her "the palm wine to soothe a man's soul's wounds in winter." It was a great balm to speak of his loved and lost ones, and to hear kind words about his work, which had been neglected partly on account of his ill-health, and partly because his ambitions had been lying dormant for sheer want of some electric touch. He was a man who imperatively needed sympathy; he did not belong to that sad company of detached souls who, by reason of sorrow or circumstance, or character or loss of ideals, end by becoming sufficient unto themselves, and can do their work independently of outside influence. There was nothing of this about him: to be, or to accomplish anything, he needed all the help he could get from warm human intercourse, giving in return the best of his mind and spirit and individuality. The loneliness of life which had fallen on him had been almost like death to him; but he had passed through the dark valley of desolation, and now heard for the first time a voice which reached him with a message of comfort and courage and regeneration.

The next morning after Nora's visit, he went to work, making notes of some things he remembered for his new volume of the History, and amusing himself too by jotting down, just to tease her, a few of Nurse Isabel's

idiosyncrasies. Indeed he was so bright and seemed so much more alive, that, if Nurse Isabel had allowed him, he would have driven down to the gate-house and called on Nora. But she suggested he should wait a day or two more, and he gave in when she promised to ask Nora to come again.

And Nora did not fail him. She wished to see him; and though she did not put the thought in so many words to herself, she felt that it was a relief to her spirit to be with a nature like Brian's after a spell of intimacy with a man like Theodore Bevan.

So she came looking her best, and bringing heather and autumn-leaves and two or three trailing branches, and some bracken which she had gathered in the morning. She decorated his room, and he watched her and admired her. Then she sat down beside him, and he pointed triumphantly to his note-book and a few loose sheets of paper.

"See how I have taken your words to heart," he said. "I have begun work again."

His directness, and the simple natural welcome he gave her as though to a friend of old standing, who was interested in him as a matter of course, and in whom he wished to confide as a matter of course, pleased Nora greatly. Here was another man who knew what he wanted, and dispensed with formalities and preliminaries: she thought of that long afterwards when she was freer in spirit to make contrasts.

"How glad I am that you were able to come," he said, as he turned over his papers. "See, I have had these three letters this morning: one from Germany, another from Sweden, and another from a distinguished American historian."

"Well," she said, as she gave them back to him,

"you have indeed begun the day brightly, with words like these to greet you. Surely they must help you."

"They have helped me to-day," he said. "I have read them over many times, and I have been longing to show them to you."

Then, without hesitating, and taking it for granted that she wanted to hear, he began speaking about his work, and his new ideas for the new volume: the thoughts came bounding out, grateful, as it were, for being released from the lonely prison of the mind, and, once free, they seemed to gather in strength and substance. He spoke a great deal about the differentiations of religious feelings, and Nora could not help noticing the contrast between the minds and temperaments of her two new acquaintances. This Brian Uppingham had studied and analysed the leading features of religious thought, and had traced the growth and decline of this sect, and now of that, and the historical consequences of either; he had plunged deep into inquiry, and was in fact a theological and historical vivisector; and yet, with all the story of man's strange method of worshipping God, and God's still stranger acquiescence — with all this story at his fingers' ends, God had remained in his heart and in his intellect as an unalterable necessity; and man as a pilgrim starting off on a journey, and in spite of all deviations for the moment, keeping to the main road — God.

But Theodore Bevan believed in no one — in nothing. He was the spirit of pessimism, just as this historian was the spirit of reasonable optimism.

Brian Uppingham dealt with motives on a large scale, and Theodore Bevan kept a small petty shop in a back slum. That was the difference between them. But . . . It was always "but" in Nora's mind when she began to

criticise Theodore Bevan. A shade passed over her face, and Brian noticed it.

"Ah, I am boring you," he said. "But it is your own fault, you know. You roused me up to my old interests."

"No, no," she said. "You are not boring me. It is delightful to hear you talk. It was merely that just one irritating thought crossed my mind."

"Is it possible that you ever feel irritable?" he asked. "I don't believe it. I thought that sort of thing was left to me. Nurse Isabel says I am not the Prince of Darkness, but worse — the Prince of Irritability! I rather think she is right. Isn't she a curious character? She is a brick, really, and I have been a terrible trial to her."

"She was never intended by nature to be a nurse, I imagine," Nora said.

"She says that she never wished to be anything," he answered, smiling, "except a rich lady at large. It is very curious how some women are born with a distinct disapproval of work; and perverse fate demands that they should be the very ones to have to buckle to."

"And high-born damsels eat their hearts away because they may not work," said Nora.

Thus they drifted on to the subject of women and their careers. Nora was delighted to see how keen he was about everything to do with women and their new opportunities.

"Horrible old curmudgeons," he said, speaking of the authorities of the older universities who refused to grant degrees to women, even though they suffered them to pay their fees and undergo the examinations. "And to think that many of those very colleges were founded, or at least contributed to, by women themselves."

"It is only a question of time, and we shall have our degrees," Nora said.

"Yes," he said; "that is very true. But I think it is more than time that we men united in sweeping away all hindrances for women. Surely by now we ought to be ashamed of our selfishness and persistence in arrogating to ourselves all the things most worth having in life: the free play of character, and the fair play in the ordinary difficulties of everyday existence, and the open field in which to test the strength and value of ability and ambition. All these privileges we kept jealously for ourselves, and others too of baser calibre: the privilege of behaving just as the lower nature in us suggested, and then of passing on, as though we had only acted in accordance with the dictates of our manhood, and that was the end of the matter, so far as we were concerned; and then the privilege of judging and condemning to life-long social damnation the women whose passionate instincts had also run away with them, but less deliberately than with us. But that is all beginning to get better now."

"Ah, you are on our side," she said, warmly.

"Of course I am," he answered. "But it is not from virtue or unselfishness on my part. It is from bringing up. My own beautiful, gallant mother influenced me in all these matters. She laid bare to me patiently and persistently, but without the least aggressiveness, the whole story of women's sufferings and limitations physical and mental. I learnt it in fragments at odd moments, during quiet walks and talks. I forgot a good deal of it as a lad, of course; but the general effect remained and never lost its hold on me. She was one of the real pioneers of woman's liberation; and she was so beautiful, so refined, so gallant and high-minded, and so intensely human, and with such a wonderful gift of sympathy and affection, that I never think of her except

with a thrill of love and admiration. Here is her dear face. You see how gallant she looked."

Nora looked at the beautiful little miniature which he drew from a case on the table.

"They say," he continued, "that a woman can do anything with a man, and I think it is true that she can make of him what she pleases. That is why I believe that in all things that really matter, the right bent can be given to men at the very onset of their lives, if women and mothers care enough to take the trouble, and if they understand how. I don't say that I have turned out worthy of her untiring efforts, but still something remains which would never have been there but for her."

"Perhaps many women do not understand how to influence their boys," Nora said.

"Perhaps," he answered; "but I also think that they have not cared enough. It has always been a matter of surprise to me, ever since I began to think on these subjects, how very little women have cared about the moral quality of their influence upon the minds of their boys and lovers and husbands."

"Perhaps it is that they take the spiritual for granted," Nora said.

"Ah! and that is the mistake they make, then," he answered. "The spiritual has to be put into a man, and the best person to do it is a woman."

"You believe in women," Nora said, smiling. "It is a pleasure to be with a man who thinks us capable of the very best in life."

"But I shall always think that you have been extraordinarily indifferent to your limitations," he said. "If you all had cared more, you would not have endured such a long and unjust servitude. Ages ago you would have broken down the barriers, and gone free."

"But you know yourself how each one of us, men and women alike, is chained down by custom and tradition," Nora said. "It is not an easy matter to win freedom, even in petty concerns; and far greater, therefore, must the difficulty be when we are dealing with serious importances. And I do not think that any man, however sympathetic and broad-minded, can ever realise how heavy the fetters of prejudice have been for women. I don't suppose we young women of the present day realise this. I am sure I, for one, have never even tried to imagine what life was for women when they were not allowed to do all the things which they do now as a matter of course. We have already begun, you see, to take our newly-won privileges in the same way as we all accept, without much notice or comment, the rising and setting of the sun."

"But after all, that is the greatest tribute to those who worked for you," he said. "It means that the impossible has become the possible — the commonplace of everyday life. And," he added, "those who lead the way do not expect gratitude. It is enough for them to have led the way."

"I think we have a tremendous number of things to talk to each other about," Nora said, spontaneously.

"I am quite sure of it," Brian answered; and his face lit up with happiness, and a tender soft light came into his eyes.

"There is Nurse Isabel waving to us," he said, turning to the window. "She has had tea laid under the cedar-trees. Shall we come?"

CHAPTER XVI

THEODORE BEVAN INTRUDES

"THAT is a man after my own heart," Nora said, as she left Brian Uppingham, "and with a way of looking at life which I appreciate with every fibre of my soul.

"Heart and brains in perfect accord," she said.

"And a man who has kept the whiteness of his soul," she said.

"A dear, dear fellow!" she said, with great tenderness.

"And I know his heart has gone out to me," she said, softly. "I felt it come."

She stopped on the moor which she was crossing.

"But why do I not feel more glad?" she asked. "Two months ago I should have—"

The thought broke off, interrupted by the remembrance of Theodore Bevan.

"Ah!" she said, irritated with herself and him. "Why does he always force himself upon me?"

So often she found her mind wandering off to Theodore Bevan — not from any eagerness to reach him, but from sheer inability to keep away. It was not merely that she could not banish him from her thoughts, but that, against her own inclination, she was obliged to take an interest in him, which was always intensified when any one began to criticise him. For the very life of her, she could not help being sorry for him. She felt that he was a detached soul, and embittered by bereftness and unloveliness of surroundings and influences. When she thought of her own happy childhood, girlhood, and

womanhood, made so rich and warm by her father's kindness and by his keen appreciations and enthusiasms, which are the very glow of life, she felt that it was impossible not to sympathise with one who had been compelled to live a chilled existence — at a time, too, when the cold settles into the system. Her father had loved her mother passionately; and when she died, giving birth to this baby-girl, he added to his own tender love as much of a mother's love as the gentlest man's heart can ever imagine. Nora knew she was born of love, and brought up in love. But this man, this curious Theodore Bevan, had been born, so he told her, of indifference. How could any one help being sorry for his bad luck? And then his small stature, and indeed his whole appearance, appealed to her womanly sympathy; and she always noticed that he was painfully conscious of his physical shortcomings. As a matter of fact, he was absolutely satisfied with his physique, and would not have changed with any one. But Nora did not know that. So she was very much touched when he said to her one day:

"The binding of the book is not beautiful. It is not tree-calf."

She had remembered this specially, because she had told him that her favourite binding was tree-calf.

But, putting aside everything else, she could not forget that he said she was influencing him, and that each time he came to her, part of the soreness of his soul was healed. That alone would be quite enough to attract a woman, in spite of herself, to any kind of man. He had told her too that each time he left her, the same words rose to his lips, and he spoke them aloud when he was alone: she knew of course that they were some words expressive of gratitude, but she often wondered what they exactly were. She would have been glad to know. And

now on this very afternoon, when she would fain have put him from her mind and dwelt only on that gentle fellow, the historian, she still went on wondering what those words really were. So, torn by many conflicting thoughts, she opened the door of her lodgings. There was no light in the sitting-room, and the fire was low, but she smelt the fragrance of a cigar, and discovered her father in the arm-chair.

"Why, father, how delightful!" she said, lovingly. "I was coming to the King's Head to tell you all about Mr. Uppingham. But as you are here, we can have a cosy evening to ourselves alone. We have not been alone for a long time."

At that moment she looked up, and saw Theodore Bevan too. He was sitting in the recess of the window.

"Then we are not alone after all," she said, in a tone of voice which betrayed distinct disappointment. Her father was rather surprised at her want of courtesy, but secretly pleased, for he and Theodore Bevan had been sitting each other out in the hopes of her return, and he was feeling annoyed at the little man's continued intrusion.

"My dear," he said, cheerily, "Mr. Bevan and I have been waiting a long time for you: Mr. Bevan longer than I, for I found him here. I came to ask you to have supper with me at the King's Head, and to chase away a sort of melancholy which has laid siege to me, born of airy nothing, and yet very substantial."

"I'll soon dispel it," she said, as she bent over him. And then she lit the lamp and turned to Theodore Bevan, who had now risen from the window-seat, and stood holding a book in his hand. He looked singularly pale and suffering, a little shred of poor humanity. Nora was touched at once, and regretted her impatient words.

"I have brought you a first edition of this poet's latest volume," he said gently. "I heard you say that you coveted first editions. I have the same taste myself."

Nora took the book from him. It was a collection of poems by a new minor poet.

"Oh, I am glad to have this," she said. "I have been reading the review. How good of you to think of me!"

She turned by instinct to the fly-leaf. On it were written the words, "Nora Penhurst: from her friend."

She placed it on her desk, and stood hesitating a moment, as though she wished to say something. But she changed her mind, told her father that she wanted to put on a warmer dress, and that she would be down in five minutes, and said "good night" to Theodore Bevan.

"I am in no hurry," he replied, settling down deliberately in a chair. "I can wait too, and we can all three go together."

When she came back again, she found the two men waiting in absolute silence; and in silence she and they passed on their way to the King's Head. Arrived there, Roger Penhurst and Nora went straight to his room. He closed the door and threw his felt hat impatiently on the sofa, where it landed in the midst of his books and music and fiddlestrings.

"Confounded little limpet!" he exclaimed. "Thank goodness, I am free of him at last. I wonder he did not suggest spending the whole evening with us."

"He is not very tactful sometimes," Nora said, taking off her hat.

"Tact, indeed!" Roger Penhurst replied. "It is not a question of tact. It is a question of damned obstinacy."

At that moment Mrs Mary Shaw came in to lay the cloth. She was in the best of spirits. She had done a splendid day's trade, and had filled Mr William Parrington with envy and wonder, and everything had gone swimmingly. Even the ancestors had only grumbled enough to keep them in health. She served an excellent supper, and was disappointed when she found that Roger Penhurst had scarcely touched his food.

"I'm afear'd you're ill," she said. She was very kind to him.

"Oh no, Mrs Mary," he said, trying to smile; "not ill, only rather melancholy. If I wore an apron, you know, I should be covering my face with it."

Mrs Shaw nodded sympathetically, cleared the table quickly, and disappeared.

"It is all along of Miss Nora keeping company with the little viper gentleman," she confided to Parrington.

When they were alone, Nora drew her chair close to her father by the fire, and put her hand on his knee.

"You are not quite happy, father dear," she said, kindly.

"I'm out of tune," he answered, looking straight into the fire — "quite out of tune. I have spent most of the afternoon thinking about all the mistakes I have made in life; and that is not an exhilarating occupation. Still, it keeps one busy. For when you have lived through a long life, you have a long list."

"Even when one has only lived a short time, one has a long enough list, I think," said Nora.

"Probably," said her father, "but one does not look at it then; one is engaged the whole time in adding to it. At least, that was my experience. But when at last a poor devil does examine it, he may well feel downhearted, if he is in the mood to be miserable. And that

has been my mood to-day. I have been mourning over my failures and disallusions, and finding out that old age is rather a sorrowful time of life, though I have tried to pretend so long that it isn't. It is wonderful how well we can pretend, and how continuously, without losing any pleasure or patience in the game: just as children weaving fancies for themselves, and fashioning a fairy land out of nothing, and not tiring easily of their many make-believings. But they tire at last — and so do we."

"Why, father," Nora said, fondling his white curls, "this is not the language one hears usually from you. You have taught me to believe that life has much to offer, even to the very end, if we only care enough; and that we are fools not to care, robbing ourselves in fact of treasures lying ready for us to take without stint."

"Is that what I've taught you, child?" he said. "Well, I'm glad. Don't take any notice of what I say; it is just that I am a little overshadowed."

"I think I have been leaving you too much alone," she said, full of sudden regret.

"Perhaps that has had something to do with it," he answered, half to himself. "And I am tired of being here. I am beginning to long for home." Then he added, more cheerfully:

"I have not taken much interest in anything the last day or two. I have not even cared to measure any one's head! There was a commercial traveller here yesterday with a most attractive headpiece, and I did not concern myself about it in the least."

"Then you must indeed be feeling out of spirits," Nora said, smiling, for they had always had a great deal of fun together over his irresistible desire to measure heads and feel bumps.

"I, too, am tired of being here, father," she added.

"We will go home. In any case, I should have to return to London before long, as my teaching will soon begin. But we will go away whenever you like — tomorrow if you choose."

"We must wait for Great-uncle's birthday party," Roger said. "I have promised to play something on that august occasion."

"And I think you ought to make the acquaintance of the historian," Nora said. "I feel sure you would get on with him."

"If he is anything like your little centipede, my dear," Roger replied, "Heaven forbid that I should see him. It is not often that I dislike a friend of yours. But we do not seem to agree about Mr Bevan."

Nora was silent.

"And that reminds me," he said, "he gave you a book to-night. If I were you, I would not accept anything from him. I never have believed in gifts: they are dangerous weapons, unless you are absolutely sure of the people who wield them. That was the only piece of wisdom I ever learnt from my father, and I pass it on to you, my dear. It is the only piece you will ever get from me."

"I won't forget it," Nora said, looking intently into the fire. "I am sure you are right, father."

Then, after a few minutes' silence, she added:

"Brian Uppingham is not at all like Mr Bevan."

"Then I shall be delighted to meet him," Roger Penhurst answered, genially. "We will wait a day or two longer, and after that we will go home to dear old London."

CHAPTER XVII

NURSE ISABEL DELIVERS A MESSAGE

NURSE ISABEL came into her patient's room holding a letter in her hand.

"I have just heard from Dr Morgan," she said, "and he asks me to come to town on Friday, as he has a very important case which he desires to entrust to my care, and my care only. You see how much the doctors think of me."

"Wait until the doctors become the patients themselves," Brian Uppingham replied. "Then they will sing another song: probably in the minor key."

"Well, this particular patient does happen to be a doctor," said Nurse Isabel, with perfect good nature — "a distinguished consulting physician, a specialist on diseases of the nervous system, probably a rival to Dr Morgan himself, though I believe the medical name for a rival is 'colleague.'"

"My word, you will have to be careful, Nurse Isabel," said Brian, gravely. "No nervous headaches lasting the whole afternoon; no prolonged fits of depression, but a perpetually sweet and soothing manner, indicative of a lovely spirit which has reached perfection through suffering. How on earth will you manage?"

Nurse Isabel looked at him and they both laughed heartily, for she enjoyed a joke, even at her own expense, and his criticisms of her were always tempered by a certain under-current of kindly fun quite characteristic of himself.

"Oh, I shall manage all right if the case is a short one," she answered. "But if it is long, Heaven help me! He has broken down from overwork, so his 'colleague' writes, and he has a delusion that he is being pursued by the devil. I expect we shall soon drive away the devil with milk and massage, and our eminent specialist will take his place once more in his consulting-room, and speak very severely to his patients on the subject of self-control, and mental balance, and a calm spirit in this distracting age. Bah! how I do hate the word self-control. Self-controlled people are generally a sort of cross between an oyster and an elephant."

"Am I a cross between an oyster and an elephant?" he asked.

"Goodness, no!" she said. "You are not self-controlled. You are, as I said, the Prince of Irritability, or at least you were. You have changed so much lately. Quite improved! I shall be almost sorry to leave you."

"Thank you," he answered. "But must you really go?"

"Yes," she said. "But Dr Morgan writes that if you are not well enough to be left, he can send another nurse, a Miss Kathleen Foster. He recommends her highly, but I don't think anything of her, and, between you and me, doctors are no judges! She stamps about like a hippopotamus, talks broad Scotch, and insists on reading aloud long-winded commentaries on the New Testament. She is far more trying than I am. Take my advice, and don't have her. You are much better, and I don't think you want any more nursing. Go to the King's Head after I leave you, and get Mrs Mary Shaw to take a motherly interest in you. If I were you, I should stay on there for three or four more weeks.

Make up your mind to eat properly and regularly, and do not work yourself into a fever over your stupid History, and when you return to London, see as much as you can of Miss Penhurst. She is going back in a few days."

"I'll take your advice, Nurse Isabel," he said. "It is a sensible prescription."

"And talking of her reminds me that I have received another letter," she said. "It is from my Captain in the Hussars, enclosing several valuable stamps. You know I have spoken to you about that wretched little man who visits Miss Penhurst at the Castle. Now listen to this part of my letter: 'I am so glad to hear you are not having quite such a deadly time of it, little Nursie, and that the distinguished historian is beginning to show signs of ordinary intelligence, and is not boring you to distraction. You have had a run of bad luck lately! I think I shall have to fall ill myself, just to set you on the right road again. At present, though, I am in splendid form. Curious that you should come across Theodore Bevan in that hole of a place. From your description of him, I have no doubt he is the little skunk that annexed and nearly annihilated my cousin, Madge Carson. He had a sort of mental fascination for her, and for about two years she scarcely spoke to any one else. I was awfully fond of her myself, and it was maddening to see her so taken up with that little worm. She changed so, and seemed to lose all her fun. However, that was two years ago, and she has recovered herself and taken to bookbinding, and is engaged to be married. I saw her the other day: she has just returned from the Continent. If you have a chance, give the fellow a good dressing, for my sake, and tell him to send for me if he would like to be kicked.'"

She closed the letter, and put it pensively in her pocket.

"It is a curious thing," she said, with an earnestness unusual in her, "but I have always disliked the idea of Miss Penhurst knowing that man."

"Miss Penhurst attracts you a good deal," Brian said.

"I think I am not the only one whom she does attract," Nurse Isabel said, mischievously. "You would not believe it of me," she added, "but I have always wished to have a woman friend. I envy with all my heart the friendship of two women. If I were a writer, I believe I could write something beautiful about that."

"You are a strange mixture, Nurse Isabel," he said.

"Yes," she continued, taking a golden brown chrysanthemum out of the vase and playing with it, "I should write about friendship and the wonderful colour it gives to life, and I should write about love and good fellowship and loneliness. If I could write it, it would be a beautiful book. That is what we all think, I suppose. Well, well, my fate in life is not to write books, but to nurse the people whose fate it is to write them."

She went out of the room as she spoke, leaving Brian thinking about her: he had been learning to understand her better lately, and was constantly coming upon fine threads of precious metal embedded in the coarser composition of her nature. He realised, as we all have to realise, not once, but incessantly — and each time the lesson is a new one — that the fine threads of precious metal are there, waiting for the miner's pick-axe to discover them. But the miners must be deft, or else the treasure will remain hidden from them. When Nurse Isabel returned, she was dressed for driving, and seemed in excellent humour.

"You understand," she said, "that we will drive first

to the Castle, and I will get out, and Miss Penhurst will take my place. She knows the country well, and wants to take you through some pretty lanes. What a lucky fellow you are, and how good I am to you! I will wait in her rooms until you return, and if you are not too tired, we will all go to the King's Head and pay a visit to Mrs Mary Shaw and Mr Penhurst; and after that I will take your remains home. Do you feel equal to the programme?"

There did not appear to be any doubt about that, and in a few minutes, both Nurse Isabel and patient were rumbling along in the heavy carriage drawn by the sleepy horses, and driven by the still sleepier coachman. It was a delightful afternoon, with a scent in the air of hay and autumn leaves and clover. They passed through the sweet pine woods and drank in that fragrance too, and made their way into the high-road, turning off at length in the direction of the Castle. When they arrived there, they found Nora and Theodore Bevan standing in the road. Nora came forward to greet them, and Brian asked her to take a little drive with him. Nurse Isabel was in high glee at the meeting between the two men, and did not know how to enjoy the situation sufficiently. Nora would go off with Mr Uppingham, and she and Mr Bevan would be left watching the retreating carriage. That alone would be an admirable snubbing for him; and that was not all either. She put her hand in her pocket, and from sheer satisfaction crackled and crumpled her Hussar's letter.

Nora meanwhile turned to Theodore Bevan with just a little embarrassment, imperceptible perhaps to other people, but not to him. It was some consolation to his annoyance.

"You will excuse me?" she said.

"I am not left any choice," he answered, drawing his thin lips together into a smile which could not have been called comforting. But he had the tact to shut the carriage door for her, and to raise his hat slightly as the coachman drove off. Then he and Nurse Isabel were left.

"What a nice-looking couple they are," Nurse Isabel said, sweetly. "I am so glad he is having the pleasure of her company. He admires her tremendously. And I do not wonder — do you?"

"I do not care to discuss Miss Penhurst with you," he said, quietly. "If you will allow me to pass, I will wait her return."

"I am also intending to wait until they come back," Nurse Isabel replied, with provoking sweetness; and she followed Theodore Bevan over the drawbridge, and into Nora's sitting-room, where she installed herself in the rocking-chair. She was enjoying herself more and more, for he did not attempt to conceal the vexation which he felt in having to endure her presence, and she was delighted to have the power of annoying him. He read the newspaper, and she glanced at some magazines. She rocked herself in the chair, and he looked up, obviously irritated both by her and the movements.

"There is a most fascinating article on bookbinding in this magazine," she said, after a few moments of silence. "Are you interested in that subject?"

"Not in the least," he answered, going on reading the newspaper.

"Here is a most lovely design for a book cover," Nurse Isabel continued. "I *must* show that to Madge Carson."

She looked at him out of the corner of one eye, and saw that he had put down his paper.

"Madge Carson," he said, uneasily.

"I have heard from her cousin, Captain Lester, that she has just returned from the Continent," Nurse Isabel went on, without heeding his exclamation. "I shall be seeing her in town soon. Have you any message for her?"

"Madge Carson," he repeated; "the name is familiar to me: the circumstances I forget."

"She probably does not forget the circumstances," said Nurse Isabel, amiably, "nor does her cousin. In fact, he sends a message to you, which I am very reluctant to deliver. But I always do deliver messages on principle. I trust you will sympathise with the difficulty of my position. Captain Lester desires me — well, he desires me — to say that if you would like to be kicked, he will have great pleasure in coming to do so at once."

Theodore Bevan turned to her, white with passion.

"How dare you speak to me like that? I beg of you to leave me."

"I am afraid I cannot take your dismissal of me from Miss Penhurst's room as authoritative," replied Nurse Isabel, now well warmed up to her *rôle*. "If you are annoyed by my presence here, I would suggest that you remove yourself. Personally speaking, I would just as soon have you in this room as not; so that I am not the objecting party."

She was enjoying herself so much that she conducted herself with admirable self-control.

"But if you decide to go," she continued, "please tell me, before you leave, what message you would like me to take to Miss Margaret Carson. This will be your

last chance of telling me, because I am going to London to-morrow; and you have learnt that I can deliver messages, and that I am therefore to be trusted. Shall I tell her that you are in excellent health and having splendid sport down here, and that you are trying to annex and annihilate another girl, probably just in the same way as you did her; and that you think you are getting on pretty well, but that you have unexpected reverses of fortune, as for instance, when suddenly, without any warning, she goes driving with another man, whom she admires greatly and who admires her still more; and leaves you cutting a very ridiculous figure in the road? That is all I can think of at present, but no doubt you can add to it for me."

He bit his lips as he stood before her trembling from rage, and scarcely able to restrain himself. A most devilish expression of cruelty was on his face: Nurse Isabel herself was startled, though she did not betray the slightest sign of concern. He raised his arm, as though to strike, but he let it fall at once, and seized his hat.

"I will rid myself of you and your impertinence," he said slowly. "You can tell Miss Carson what you choose: it is of no matter to me. But you may also tell her that, some day, I will be even with you."

He stepped quietly across the room, and passed out in his usual noiseless fashion.

"Like a burglar," thought Nurse Isabel, who remained in solitary glory and triumph, gloating over the experience, and only regretting that it had not lasted longer.

Meanwhile Nora and Brian were taking their drive together. Everything delighted him: the hedges with all their many treasures, the bracken, golden brown and pale yellow, the foxgloves springing up here and there,

the fields with the harvesters hard at work, and the hay-stacks of last year, looking thoroughly sturdy and comfortable; the sheep grazing on the slopes yonder, and the cows coming down the lane following a scrap of a boy, a "farthing's worth of humanity," as Brian called him. The sun shone brightly, lighting up the autumn-tinted trees, rejoicing the hearts of the birds, and casting a golden lustre on the hay-laden waggons passing leisurely along the road. Nothing escaped Brian's notice; everything ministered to his pleasure; the dogs, Smoker and Carlo, bounding joyously in front, the fragrance of a clover field, the children strolling home from school, the music of the nightingales in a dark deep lane pointed out by Nora as her favourite walk. He, too, knew how to enjoy, and after a long spell of listless indifference was making once more a thankful use of his birthright. He told Nora this, and she saw it for herself. He would fain have gone on mile after mile, and she too; but there was the other part of Nurse Isabel's programme to be considered, and so they turned homeward and arrived at the Castle, where they found her in a state of radiant exultation. They told her how much they had enjoyed themselves, and indeed there was no mistaking the happiness written large on their faces. But Nurse Isabel said that she had enjoyed herself far more than they, and that she felt ten years younger for her delightful interview with Mr Bevan.

"It was short," she said, "but quite unique. What an interesting companion he is, to be sure! I only wish he had not hurried away so quickly. However, I suppose I shall be seeing him again."

Nora glanced at her uneasily and half suspected that some *contretemps* had taken place; and Brian,

who remembered the Hussar's letter, longed to know whether Nurse Isabel had given the message. But before he had time to ask, they were in front of the quaint old King's Head with its weather-beaten sign of His Majesty Henry the Eighth, and there was Mrs Mary Shaw carrying out great plates of food for the dogs, and now coming forward to greet Nora and her friends; and there too was Roger Penhurst, smoking a cigar, and sitting on the bench side by side with great-uncle, who was pulling vigorously at his long clay-pipe. Before very long, Brian Uppingham was quite at ease with his new friends, feeling that he knew them well from Nurse Isabel's description of them. He chatted with Mrs. Mary Shaw, and even took the liberty of inquiring after Mr William Parrington, and he was invited to great-uncle's birthday party which was coming off on the following day. This was a sure sign that he had found favour with the hostess of the King's Head. He at once attracted Mr Penhurst, who opened out to him without any preliminaries, spoke enthusiastically about his book, measured his head, showed him two curious old books on trees which he had lately found at Langton, and then, by request of every one, played to him on the violoncello, making the instrument sob and sing and vibrate with tenderness, and arousing in the hearts of the listeners sad and glad and peaceful thoughts, and that strange longing born always of beautiful music.

It was in vain that Nurse Isabel tried to hurry the historian home, for she was a little anxious at seeing him looking overtired, and this was his first big outing. He absolutely refused to be ordered away.

"Don't you bully him," Roger said, shaking his bow at her. "He is enjoying being with us, and it will do him good."

So she gave him a few minutes' grace, and at last took him reluctantly away.

"I had to do it," she said, as they drove off. "If I had waited any longer, there would not have been even any remains for me to bring home. Don't be disagreeable. If you will leave off sulking, I will tell you about my interview with Mr Bevan."

CHAPTER XVIII

A PAGE FROM A JOURNAL

LATE that night, when every one else at the King's Head had retired to rest, Theodore Bevan made the following entry in his journal:

"Of course I have no means of knowing how much that objectionable woman, Nurse Isabel, does know about the Madge Carson episode. I was greatly astonished by her impertinent audacity, and I fear that my usual *sang-froid* deserted me altogether. However, she shall not go unpunished. In the afternoon she came here with Miss Penhurst and Uppingham, and I imagine she must have hinted something about the affair to Miss Penhurst, who brought her out alone into the garden, and at once asked her what had occurred between us. I was in my bedroom at the time, and had the advantage of hearing their conversation. Some of it was not specially flattering to me. Nurse Isabel referred to my acquaintance with Madge Carson, and to Captain Lester's courteous message. She begged my Athene to have nothing to do with me, and told her she was sure that I was a sort of vampire who would suck every drop of health and happiness out of her. My Athene contradicted herself sadly: she said that it was absurd to suppose that she would allow herself to be influenced to that extent by any one, and certainly not by such a one as Mr Bevan. I noticed a slight disparagement in her words which must not be allowed to occur again. And then, irritated by what she considered Nurse Isabel's

interference, she said that if she chose to submit to the influence of a hundred Mr Bevans, it was her concern and hers only. To which Nurse Isabel replied: 'Good Heavens, one Mr Bevan is enough in all conscience!' And they both laughed at that. I laughed too. Before they went in, that odious woman said:

"'Well, don't have it against me that I interfered with your private affairs. I felt I must warn you, although I knew you would hate me for it.'

"'I don't at all hate you for it,' Athene answered in a most friendly manner. 'You have made me feel that you have a very kind regard for me.'

"'I am glad you have felt that,' Nurse Isabel answered. 'I hope we shall see something of each other in London.'

"'Of course we shall,' my Athene said. 'I shall give you my address, and look out for you.'

"(My Athene must be protected from such an undesirable friendship. I shall take good care that she does not see much of Nurse Isabel in London. That in itself will be the beginning of the punishment, for the woman evidently likes Miss Penhurst.)

"As they passed into the house to join the other members of their coterie, they spoke in a low voice about Mr Brian Uppingham. I did not catch what they said. . . .

"I have never been able to understand what it is that educated people find to like in ignorant village folk. For me, they have no existence, no significance. . . .

"Madge Carson back in England. . . . I think I used to call her Eirene — my peace. She must not be allowed to interfere with me and the historian. . . ."

Here Theodore Bevan put down his pen, and gave himself up to his thoughts.

CHAPTER XIX

GREAT-UNCLE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

MRS MARY SHAW had been preparing many days for great-uncle's birthday party, which was to celebrate his eighty-fifth anniversary. Like most hostesses in any walk of life, she had succeeded in tiring herself thoroughly beforehand, having taken this opportunity of doing a great many things which had not any bearing on the entertainment, and could have been done much better on another occasion. However, the ways of housewives always were mysterious and subtle; and no doubt Mrs Mary Shaw had her own reasons for papering Wullie's little bedroom, and turning out her store cupboard, and making a fresh supply of onion pickle, and washing blankets at a time when one would have thought she had quite a heavy enough task in contriving cakes and pasties, cleaning out the kitchen, polishing her stove, rubbing up her brass candlesticks and the great copper warming-pan which hung on the wall next to the old clock, itself a handsome old family possession. Visitors to the King's Head had often wanted to buy that clock, and also the beautiful lustre ware which stood on the top shelf of the dresser, and was never allowed to be touched by any one except Mrs Shaw herself.

"No; I don't care to sell them old ancestral things of the past," she always said. "They're like the ancestors themselves; they take up a deal of room, and want a deal of rubbing up, but I like for them to be there. And no one can't buy them from me. Though what

Wullie will do with them when he's growed up and becomes a wicked spendthrift, is more than I pretend to know." So she polished the lustre jugs and quaint old teapots and goblets, rich brown with pink and green flowers on them, and she put beeswax and turpentine on the old clock, and rubbed it into the wood until she was red in the face, and very nearly having an apoplectic fit. And she was just going to clean by the same method great-uncle's old fiddle, which, together with the bacon and hams, hung from one of the beams, when she was luckily prevented by Mr Penhurst, who strolled in at the right moment, rescued the sacred instrument, and, settling himself down in the arm-chair, mounted guard over it.

"And here I'll stay, Mrs Mary," he said, "until your terrible spasm of cleaning is over."

"And right welcome you be," she said, pretending to polish the chair. "You sit there nice and quiet, and give me advice about the vittles, dear Mr Penhurst."

Then she turned her attention to the serious question of the food, which, as usual, was to be the most important item of the evening's entertainment. Why it always should be so, is a mystery which time so far has not elucidated. But perhaps future generations will learn why, in the past, it was always considered necessary to celebrate with elaborately-prepared meals all great and solemn and sentimental occasions, including religious festivals. They will trace the custom back to its original barbarism, and rid themselves of it — perhaps!

Great-uncle, being the hero of the hour, was told that he might invite any one he pleased, and he settled on his old chum the clogger Daniel, who shared with him his preference for that more congenial resort, the Miners' Tavern. Great-uncle also asked Nora Penhurst, who

had won his heart years ago by friendly words of greeting and shag. He said he didn't care who else came, provided that Great-great-aunt Rebeccah Renaldson was not invited. He never could abide her, he said; besides which, he was not greatly drawn to old folk! Mrs Mary Shaw had to take quite half an hour away from the cooking in order to persuade him to consent to her presence; but she succeeded at last, and great-uncle was reduced to submission outwardly, though not inwardly.

"Nasty spiteful old creature!" he was heard to murmur several times during the day, thus showing that the attaining to one's eighty-fifth year does not necessarily imply a safe arrival at the harbour of peace and goodwill.

David the blacksmith was also asked. Mr William Parrington asked himself. Miss Shafton the postmistress was invited; but as it was known that she could not resist playing hymn-tunes on a harmonium, if she got anywhere near one, Wullie undertook to keep her away from the dangerous instrument, and was highly delighted with his task.

"Only don't you be a-hurting of her feelings, Wullie," said Mrs. Mary Shaw. "Just you use tack, or else I'll spank you."

Wullie understood what the word "tack" meant, for he was always being told to use it in his dealings with his ancestors; and he succeeded admirably.

Mr Penhurst, of course, was invited, and had promised to play some melodies on the zither, which Reuben, Mrs Mary Shaw's quiet old father, greatly loved. The verger, Thomas Kent, a melancholy individual, who was not much interested in living people, and preferred the company of the figures on the old tombs in the church and on the quaint brasses on the pavement, was also in-

vited. He accepted for the simple reason that he felt he was the only representative of learning in the community, and that it was his duty to be present. Moreover, he was attached to Mrs Mary Shaw, who alone dared to joke with him; and also it is possible that, in his heart of hearts, he did like being amongst human beings occasionally. He was considered to be quite a scholar, and it was an acknowledged fact that he could translate the Latin inscriptions on the brasses. He did not always give the same translation, but this was a detail known only to himself.

The carpenter, Timothy Evans, a "modern spirit," was also bidden to the entertainment. He was a genial soul, and an ardent admirer of Nora's. He always said she was the nicest female he had ever met, and he would like to leave all his money to her. He had confided to her one or two of his pet grievances, and felt that she sympathised with him. His chief grievance was about the old pews in the church.

"Wormwoody old things," he said, contemptuously. "There they be a-crumbling to pieces, and here be I ready and able to make fine new ones — and cheap. As for the carving, we can do better than that nowadays."

He was not on friendly terms with the verger, whom he had often offended by his scornful allusions to the old pews and the strange old pulpit, greatly prized by antiquarians. Mrs Mary Shaw, however, relied on being able to keep the peace, and determined not to let them sit together.

Mr Theodore Bevan was not invited. Nurse Isabel was invited, but she had already returned to town. But Brian Uppingham, who had begun to come in and out at the King's Head, was included amongst the chosen, for Mrs Mary Shaw had taken quite a fancy to him, and

said he reminded her of that artist who lodged with her last summer, gave her a deal of trouble, and never paid her a penny. At first this would have seemed rather a doubtful compliment, but that she added affectionately: "And he were as nice a gentleman as ever I saw, with the pleasantest ways about him, and a light brown moustache!"

The ancestors were rubbed up until they looked almost as bright as the clock, and great-uncle was in capital form, and said he intended to sing a song. Aunt Rebeccah was in an alarmingly amiable frame of mind, and remained quite five minutes at a stretch without making any snappy remark. Mrs Shaw put on her best cap, a sweet lace affair with light blue ribbons in it. Wullie pronounced her appearance to be stunning, and Mr William Parrington, who brought her a bouquet of flowers destined to be inconveniently in her way the whole evening, said she looked like a picture.

"My word," he said, approvingly, "you grows to look younger and younger each time I see you. There won't be no keeping you back soon. That's what it is to be happy. It be the same with me. These last two or three months I've dropped three or four years off my age."

"I don't note any difference in you," replied Mrs. Mary Shaw. "Ever since I knowed you, you seem to me just about the same — about fifty year old, and a little bald."

"Forty-seven, and not at all bald," said Parrington, pleadingly.

"Well, we won't be particular about a few hairs on your head," she said, smiling, "and I be truly glad to think as you are so happy these last two months, Mr. Parrington. I expect it's all along of business being so

brisk at the Punchbowl. It do make a deal of difference. That's how it is with me. Business be so uncommon good at the King's Head, that I may well be in good spirits. And Wullie's behaving so nice. I shouldn't wonder if I wasn't mistook about him after all, and if he wasn't going to grow up a credit to his mother. And the ancestors are pretty peaceful for the likes of them. So what with Wullie and the business and the ancestors, I expect I do feel a bit comforted."

Then she looked up at Mr Parrington, and they both laughed, and Parrington sat down in the inglenook to make himself agreeable to Aunt Rebeccah, whilst Mrs Shaw came forward to meet Mr Thomas Kent, the verger, who was the first to arrive.

"Ah, Mr Kent," she said, "what a good thing you was able to leave them dead figures for a little while. Tombstones is all very well in their way, but the best of us wants a little innocent change sometimes."

Mr Thomas Kent smiled with as much sepulchral appreciation as lay in his nature, and said in his usual melancholy tone of voice, as though he were translating a Latin inscription:

"Yes, Mrs Mary Shaw, a change be good sometimes. I hear you be thinking of making a change. May Mr Parrington and you rest in peace."

"Much obliged, I am sure," replied Mrs Shaw; and at that moment Timothy Evans, the carpenter, arrived, and seeing the verger standing by himself, could not resist going up to him.

"Good day, Mr Kent," he said, grimly. "Glad to see you here, sir. I trust them old oak seats and that crazy old pulpit be holding out pretty well, considering all things."

"They'll last your time, Mr Evans," replied the verger, sulkily.

"I should doubt it," said the carpenter, winking at Wullie. "No one can say as how I be a-crumbling away. What do you think, Wullie, my lad?"

"There now," said Mrs Mary Shaw, "don't you be worrying the verger in my house, Mr Evans. You know he's that touchy, being a lone soul, and not used to the ways of living folk. You just go over yonder, and don't you come nigh him again."

Timothy laughed, and went to talk with Reuben, who had given him some medicine for indigestion, and had made him considerably worse.

"It be the right medicine for the right malady, Timothy," Reuben answered, in his quiet, obstinate manner, "and if you aren't feeling no better, it be the fault of your body, and it be no fault of mine. I made the physic myself from the real herb, and it be not a sham drug such as folk buys in a shop. It be the right medicine for your complaint, Timothy."

David the blacksmith soon put in his appearance, and at once began teasing the hostess of the King's Head. He was a privileged person, and might say and do whatever he liked, and every one was satisfied. Every one loved David: he was David to one and all, to the old and the young, and even to the little babies, who soon learnt to lisp his name. He called himself "the village nurse," and the children played in front of his workshop. They listened to the sound of his anvil; they watched the sparks flying; they crowded round him when he was shoeing the horses; they teased Ship, his faithful collie; they confided to him their griefs at school and at home, and all their bits of fun and mischief. He was full of mischief himself, and loved it in other people; and when he caught sight of Parrington to-day, he said:

"What, Mr Parrington here! Why, I did think as

how he'd been sent to the right-about long ago. Glad to see you've took him back again, Mrs Mary! My word, how that ring do suit your finger! Let's have another look at it — a remarkable pretty thing."

"Mind your own business, Davie," said Mrs Shaw, laughing, and running off to serve the tea, and adding a small quantity of rum to each cup, the unalterable code of etiquette for a party in that corner of England. Great-uncle enjoyed his dose immensely, smacked his lips, and asked for more at once, and his old chum, Daniel the clogger, agreed with him that there was nothing like a cup of tea — *that kind of tea*. The cakes, and sausage rolls, and biscuits, and "fat rascals," met with general approval, and as David said, it was "not for nothing" that Mrs Shaw had been cook to a gentlemen's club in London for over four years.

"Parrington," he said, "you be a lucky man. She do prepare a wonderful good dinner. And that be only one of her qualities. I believe, if she was to try, she could shoe a horse as well as me. And that's saying a good deal."

Every one echoed this sentiment, and Mrs Mary Shaw hid her face behind Parrington's bouquet, which Wullie had been picking up patiently and bringing from different quarters of the room. Then, when the important rite of drinking tea with rum in it, and of eating up a very fair portion of the generous supply of food had been gone through with dogged persistence, great-uncle said he would like to sing a song, a suggestion which was seconded by the whole company, excepting Great-great-aunt Rebeccah Renaldson, who said he was not to be such a goose.

"Goose yourself!" he answered, rebelliously, and he stood up, holding himself erect as though waiting to be shot, and began to give utterance to a succession of

sounds which might well have been a mixture of Chinese and North American Indian music, with perhaps a slight dash of Hungarian. No one knew what he was singing about, nor whether the language he had chosen for giving expression to his feelings was French, German, Italian, or English. But, as Mr Penhurst whispered to Nora, he was merely following the example of the most distinguished warblers in the drawing-room or concert-hall, who always preferred to keep their audiences in complete ignorance of what they *were* singing. Great-uncle sat down amidst warm applause, and a series of grunts from Aunt Rebeccah. He was quite overcome by his own private emotions, and murmured something about *childhood's dreams*, from which the company gathered that he had probably been singing them a song about youth. Then Mr Penhurst, urged by Reuben, took his zither out of its case, and arranged it on a small square table in the centre of the kitchen. Reuben crept close to him, and bent over him eagerly, his whole being intent and satisfied. It was a picturesque scene: Brian Uppingham, who was sitting near Nora, looked around and noted every detail: the quaint old kitchen, the great oaken beams hung with bacon and a fiddle; the crockery and lustre ware on the fine old dresser; two comfortable cats, a black one and a sandy fellow, staring into the glowing fire; the cosy inglenook, where Great-great-aunt Rebeccah Renaldson, and great-uncle, and Daniel the clogger were taking their ease, their rugged faces turned expectantly toward the player; whilst Mr Thomas Kent, the verger, was installed in an easy-chair at a respectful distance from the carpenter, and guarded from all harm by Mr Parrington on one side and Mrs Mary Shaw on the other, who seemed radiant with self-satisfaction and triumph. The black-

smith leaned against the wall, and his dog, Ship, lay at his feet. Wullie crouched near the harmonium, which he was prepared to defend against all odds. Miss Shafton herself was imprisoned in the inglenook. Nora's dear old father, in the midst of these simple villagers, touching the strings of his zither for their pleasure, completed a very charming picture.

He played them such melodies as they were likely to know: 'Auld Lang Syne,' 'Home, Sweet Home,' 'Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes,' and 'When Other Lips.' There was absolute silence as the last sounds of the music died away, and tears were rolling down Aunt Rebeccah Renaldson's cheeks. Mrs Shaw told Nora afterwards, that if she had been wearing an apron, she would certainly have put it right over her face, in spite of her best cap.

After Mr Penhurst had finished playing, Miss Shafton cast several longing looks at the harmonium, and was seen to rise from her corner, and edge nearer and nearer to the dangerous spot. It is quite doubtful whether Wullie would have been able to save the company from a much-dreaded musical entertainment, but that Brian quite unconsciously came to the rescue. He rose to go, and Nora and her father had arranged to see him home, so they too rose.

"And you be really going to leave us the day after to-morrow," Mrs Mary Shaw said, shaking her head sadly at Nora.

"If David keeps his promise of driving us to the station," Nora said, smiling.

"I be not so sure about that," answered the blacksmith. "It's a job I don't like. Better ask the carpenter. Perhaps he'll be more willing to see the last of you, Miss Nora."

"Not I," said the carpenter, staunchly. "But I undertake, Davie, to drive and meet her when she comes back!"

"Oh, I like that!" answered the blacksmith. "That's been my business these many summers, and Miss Nora don't come back in no trap except mine."

"It don't matter in whose trap she comes back, so long as she *do* come back," said the hostess of the King's Head, "bringing with her her dear father."

"Your servant, madam," said Roger Penhurst, bowing gallantly, and putting his hand to his heart.

"And as for you, Mr Uppingham, sir," said Mrs Mary, turning to Brian, "I'll be very proud to make you comfortable if you comes to stay at the King's Head."

Part II

CHAPTER I

THEODORE BEVAN AGAIN

NORA and her father had been nearly three weeks in London, and were delighted to be in their home in St George's Square, Primrose Hill. Nora was, in a way, relieved by Theodore Bevan's absence, although at times she missed him unaccountably, and found herself wondering how long it would be before she would see him again. She knew, of course, that she would see him, for he had told her that he would soon be returning to London, when he hoped to have a long uninterrupted spell of companionship with her; and meanwhile he would send her a few choice books bound in tree-calf. She had taken this opportunity of asking him not to give her any presents, but in spite of her request, the books had been posted to her, and inside each were written the words — *Nora Penhurst: a loan from her friend.* This did not look as though he intended to lose sight of her, but she was too busy to pay much heed to the matter, and being once more in London, and occupied with her teaching, and her pleasures, and her many interests, and her friends, two or three of whom she had not seen for some time, Theodore Bevan retreated into the background of the scene, whence he emerged occasionally, and caused, as usual, a vague feeling of uneasiness — mental *malaise*, in fact. In addition to her High School work, she had several private pupils whom she was coaching for the

London University examinations, and she also had a large correspondence class, so that her time was well filled up. But she found leisure enough to be interested in Danish, and, urged by her old Danish professor, she had undertaken the translation of a remarkable book, with the spirit of which she had been greatly struck. She generally went on Saturdays to the British Museum to do this work; consulted her friend, who had an official position there; and then they lunched together, had their talks, and sometimes went together to the String Quartette Concerts. She always took some kind of recreation, either with her father or her friends, or both. Her friends were much attached to Mr Penhurst: his strong sympathy with and understanding of young people held them with firm chains, and his own bright interest in everything acted like a tonic on their temperaments. He seemed to have an equal attraction for totally different kinds of people; the Danish professor, the young man who wrote sonnets in the classical style, the Shakespearian critic, the Chaucer enthusiast, Nora's old college chums, and some of her Eagle Club acquaintances — all had a regard for him which made his share in her life a very delightful one. Theodore Bevan alone had made him feel that a barrier could be raised between himself and his belovèd daughter. So he was delighted to be free from the little man, and did not attempt to conceal his satisfaction; whilst, on the other hand, he spoke constantly of Brian Uppingham, and was evidently looking forward to seeing a great deal of him in London.

"You were right, my dear girl," he said, several times, "when you assured me that those two new friends of yours did not belong to the same planet. I hope to goodness' sake that, if we are destined to pass from one

planet into another, I shall not be obliged to inhabit Mr Theodore Bevan's planet.

"But the historian is a dear fellow," he added. "I should get to love him."

At first Nora did not mind her father's unappreciative allusions to Theodore Bevan, probably because she herself was feeling the advantage of being away from his influence. But as the days wore on, she began to wish to see him, and once she even wrote the few first lines of a letter to him. She had an excuse for writing, for she had not acknowledged any of the books which he had sent to her. But she did not continue the letter; she tore it up impatiently, irritated that this man should haunt her with such persistence, and that she should not be able to put him from her mind. No, she could not free herself. In spite of her reluctance, she was always recalling their walks, their talks, their many disagreements. She was always remembering what he had said about her great responsibility towards him. With her mind's eye, she saw his frail and small person, which by reason of its frailty and joylessness appealed to the tender pity within her. She felt that he was not easily understood by other people, and that in consequence, he showed them his most unfavourable side. That was the only answer which she ever made to her father's criticism of him.

"He needs to be understood," she said, "and not every one has the key."

Roger shrugged his shoulders, and wondered whether Nora thought she had the key. He was half fearful that the centipede, as he privately called him, would put in an appearance sooner or later; but meanwhile there were no signs of him, and Roger Penhurst had never concerned himself too anxiously about the future. He

was so engrossed in his music — he was organist at one of the Catholic churches — and his books, that Theodore Bevan slipped out of his horizon. But he wrote one or two letters to Brian Uppingham, to whom he had taken a great liking, and sent him some fearfully dry books on the Functions of the Brain and The Dual Mind, which were scarcely calculated, so Nora said, to help on the poor historian's convalescence. Nora wrote to him too, and sent him some lighter literature to counteract the Functions of the Brain.

"I know father's little ways," she said in her letter. "When I was recovering from rheumatic fever, he proposed to read me Spencer's 'First Principles of Psychology,' and Browning's 'Sordello,' and the Second Part of 'Faust.' So I feel I must save you from those books which I have been ordered to post to you. Go they must, for father believes they are a cure for all physical and mental woes, but I am sending this other little package with them as an antidote."

It was a Saturday morning when she posted the parcels to Brian Uppingham, and she was thinking of him as she made her way towards the British Museum. The thought brought happiness.

"Ah," she said to herself, "how is it that I do not feel free to love that dear fellow? All my heart would go out to him if — "

And there her thoughts broke off. It was always so. She was full of the memory of him that morning, and as chance would have it, her Danish professor began talking of his book, which had recently been translated in Danish, and of which he had just received a copy from a friend in Copenhagen. She was delighted to be able to tell him something about the author, and as she spoke, she found herself growing gladder at heart when

she suddenly saw a little figure coming out of the reading-room, which she had only recently left, coming deliberately towards her, and looking neither to the right nor the left. Nora's heart sank. It was Theodore Bevan. Professor Frimodt, who was a great wild-looking creature, gazed with some curiosity at the new-comer, and then stood apart, awaiting Nora's pleasure, for it was about the hour of lunch.

"Good morning," Theodore Bevan said, with quiet assurance. "Instinct told me that I should find you here. It is now lunch time. Shall we go over the way to the corner shop?"

"I generally lunch here with Professor Frimodt," Nora said, annoyed at being taken possession of in this manner, and yet unable to show all the vexation she really felt. Then turning to her Danish friend, she introduced him to Theodore Bevan, who gave him a slight acknowledgment, such as an old-established acquaintance might concede to a new one, for the existence of whom he does not see any special reason. Nora herself was amused as well as irritated, for she had known Professor Frimodt for at least twelve years, and it seemed too absurd to see him set on one side by this little upstart from the unknown. She felt very much inclined to administer a good snubbing to him, and leave him to his own devices. But she did not attempt it, although she wondered at herself for her want of moral courage: either she could not do it, or else she knew by instinct that Theodore Bevan would not accept dismissal. Perhaps it was a little of both feelings which kept her natural spirit in check.

"We can all three lunch together here," Theodore Bevan suggested, and the Danish professor assented with a fair show of politeness, but felt that the lunch, and

the chat about Scandinavian literature, was spoilt for that day.

"You were going to tell me about that new young poet whom you have discovered," Nora said to him when they were all seated and were served with their coffee and rolls.

"Ah yes, to be sure," he said, "and a real poet too, not a weakling, but a true Viking. You will be delighted with him. See here — some fine stanzas on Liberty."

As he spoke, he drew some papers from his lettercase, and then put them back again.

"Some other time," he said, shaking his bushy head, "some other time, my dear young lady, when I am overflowing with enthusiasm, and can be sure of giving you a good dose of it. Have you yet room in what your father calls the golden goblet of the wine of life? Ah, I often think of that. It is so true that enthusiasm *is* the very wine of life."

He relapsed into silence after this remark, drank his coffee in the dreariest fashion, and finally, making some excuse, slipped away, leaving Theodore Bevan in possession of the field. Nora knew that the presence of the stranger had chilled her Dane. She reflected that if he was going to have this freezing effect on all her friends, the less she saw of him the better. She rose to go, and told Bevan that she wished to spend an hour or so in the New Gallery, and she would therefore take leave of him.

"My afternoon is free," he said, simply. "I should like to spend it with you."

She could not refuse him, for at that moment he seemed to be like a child pleading.

So they went together to the Gallery, and by degrees

he overcame her unwillingness of manner, of which he had been conscious. He could be a charming companion when he chose, and on this occasion he was at his best, and talked delightfully about pictures and painters. When they were coming out of the Gallery, Nora met one of her friends who detained her in the hall. Nora held out her hand to Theodore Bevan, and expected that he would now leave her.

"I am in no hurry," he said, smiling. "I will wait for you."

"Good gracious!" she thought to herself. "Doesn't he ever intend to go?"

When she had finished talking with her friend, she looked up and saw him still waiting. Either he did not, or would not, know that she really was wishing to go on her own way. She felt she must take the matter in her hands and dismiss him. She was not accustomed to be guarded in this persistent fashion.

"Good-bye, Mr Bevan," she said, a little brusquely. "I shall see you some other time, I dare say."

"I am going in your direction," he said.

"I think I must ask you to excuse me for running off alone," she said. "I am so very tired."

He drew himself up, and stiffened into something like dignity.

"I understand," he said, gently. "I fear I have intruded on you too long. The gods have withholden many things from me, and amongst them tact. Ah, well, do not, I beg you, have that against me. Let my excuse be that I have been hungering for the sight of you. Here is your omnibus. Good-night."

All the way home Nora reproached herself for her ungraciousness to him; for he seemed to have the power of always putting people in the wrong with themselves.

She quite forgot that he had frustrated her afternoon, and annoyed her; she only remembered that she had dismissed him somewhat unkindly, and wounded his feelings. His words echoed in her ears:

"Let my excuse be that I have been hungering for the sight of you."

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORIAN AGAIN

NORA told her father that she had seen Theodore Bevan in town, but she did not add that she had been obliged to dismiss him.

"Well, and did you find him as charming as ever?" her father said, ironically.

"Father, I have never found him charming," Nora answered. "But I do think he has some kind of power which is irresistible."

"It is not safe to admit to ourselves that any kind of influence is irresistible, unless we can be quite sure that it is of a beautiful and healthy nature," said her father; "and even then we have the right to guard our independence of spirit and our best individuality. We certainly ought not to allow ourselves to be swallowed up by other people's badness — nor their goodness either."

"But what is the history of life, except a record of irresistible influences either in the one direction or the other?" Nora said.

"Quite so," he answered; "but that is no reason why we should go on adding pages to the unlovely chapters of the record."

He paused for a moment, and lit another cigar.

"I don't know what you feel about this Mr. Bevan," he said, "because you have not confided in me — and of course there was no reason why you should. But if you are being attracted to him unwillingly, and with any uneasy misgivings, and yet in the full belief that you can-

not help yourself, my Nora, then I do urge you strongly to pull yourself up in time. It can be done, and certainly by you. It is only a question of being willing to make the effort."

"You must not take too seriously what I've just said in passing," Nora answered, laying her hand on his arm.

"I don't pretend to know what kind of influence a man like Bevan would have on another person," her father continued, "but on me he would have little or no effect. But that is no reason why he should not exercise a tremendous power over some one of a different temperament from myself. The qualities in him which are unpleasing to me, may just be those very characteristics which attract some one else to him. There is no accounting for these mysterious and subtle differences in character, and influence over character. We certainly do not help any one by trying to laugh them away, and pretending that because we ourselves are not influenced by such and such a person, therefore no one else need be. We all know very little of each other — even those of us who are most intimate together — and we can be but poor judges of the forces which are likely to attract and hold other people. We can only look on and wonder, and desire to help. But we can only help provided that we are not clumsy. And most of us are clumsy — including your father."

He smiled at her as he spoke, and added quaintly:

"But then I was never intended to be a father. It is an occupation for which I had no natural genius."

"You have acquired a beautiful talent for it as you went along," Nora said, affectionately.

"I have loved you a great deal, believed in you, and have allowed you to do very much as you pleased," he answered, stroking her hair, "partly because I believed

in you so thoroughly, and partly because I have been lazy."

He was silent for a few minutes, and then said:

"You know I hate preaching, and it is rather late in the day for me to get up into the pulpit and hold forth about wisdom and discretion and all the other virtues to which I myself have never been able to attain. But I do say to you: 'Take care of your mind, and don't let it be overshadowed by any one — man or woman.'"

Nora dreamed of Theodore Bevan that night. She dreamed that they were strolling together through a dense forest, when suddenly she came upon a narrow trail leading to a more open space. She could see the sky between the branches of the trees. Her heart leapt within her. There was light, and freedom, and expanse. She bounded off, treading the fallen leaves crisply beneath her feet, and singing for very joy as she went. But all at once, the forest thickened, and she could see no sky between the clustering boughs: the narrow track came abruptly to an end, and she found herself on the former path again face to face with her companion. "Ah!" he said, "I waited for you. I knew you would come out here." Then they strolled on hour after hour, without interruption, until they chanced upon another side track, and Nora hastened on to it, and tried to make her way towards the stream. She longed to see the water, and taste of it, and feel it on her hands and feverish face. But as she struggled on, having just caught one glimpse of a silver thread in the distance, the great trees sprang up in dense array and encompassed her on all sides; and when at last she laboured through them, she came out on to the main path, where her companion was standing with a curious smile around his thin lips.

"All the paths lead back to me," he said, quietly. "It avails nothing for you to strike out for yourself. We have to journey on together, you and I, whether you like it or not."

"No; I can go back," she said, passionately. "I can retrace my steps."

He laughed, and pointed to the forest in the rear, which seemed to have become impenetrable, like a great solid wall barring the way—and Nora awoke.

She could not forget her dream; it had disturbed her.

But in the morning, after her father had gone off to his church-duties, her thoughts were diverted from evil forebodings by the arrival of Mrs Ellerton, the friend who had introduced her to Nurse Isabel. She was an old school-friend of Nora's, and was the unfortunate owner of a hypochondriacal husband, who caused her a great deal of trouble.

"He never enjoys anything," Mrs Ellerton answered, in reply to Nora's inquiries about Mr Ellerton. "He is fearful the whole time lest what he is doing at that particular moment may make him feel ill the next moment. The only thing that he does enjoy is a consultation with a new specialist, or the arrival of a new patent medicine. That was the only thing he enjoyed at Milan, and I took advantage of his content to spend the whole day in the cathedral. I can generally reckon now on having one gala-day in a new place; as it is not often that he omits to see the leading physician and the most expensive English chemist. Sometimes he honours the dentist too!"

She looked at Nora, and laughed a little bitterly.

"Don't we make curious hashes of our lives?" she said. "I always vowed that if I married it should be a man who would be a companion after my own heart,

and that we would discuss and write and read together. As it is now, the only reading we ever do together is the directions on the bottles of the new patent medicines: 'so many teaspoons for a child, and so many teaspoons for an adult.' For a soul that aspired to Dante and Shakespeare, and Herbert Spencer and Plato, the fall is rather a serious one.

"'And all the king's horses, and all the king's men,
Could not put Humpty Dumpty up again.'"

The tears came into her eyes, but she brushed them away indignantly with her little lace handkerchief, and then whisked it into Nora's face.

"Don't you get yourself into a muddle, my dear," she said, affectionately, "either a married muddle or an unmarried muddle. You've managed wonderfully so far. I suppose it is because you have always been accustomed to the companionship of men; and that must help one to keep one's judgment. Still, one never knows, and perhaps even you may come to grief, Nora. Most women do, some way or other."

"Perhaps my turn will come," said Nora, laughing, "and then I shall fulfil our common destiny."

"Well," her friend answered, "I will help you out if I am anywhere near you at the time. As you know, Tom still goes on whirling me from one end of the world to the other. He is in excellent health, but always haunted by the belief that he is a dying man. Poor old fellow: he dies several deaths every week. Certainly *he* carries out Goethe's injunction: 'Sterb' und werde.'"

"It has seemed such a pity, Bessie," Nora said. "You both might have had such a delightful life with all your money and leisure, and you were meant for it. I so grudge you this constant attendance on a man who

has nothing whatever the matter with him; and you yourself look tired out. Can't he see that?"

Bessie Ellerton shrugged her shoulders.

"I begin to think, my dear," she said, "that we all probably get the kind of life for which we were meant. If we had been meant for something else, we should have managed to attain to it. You don't believe that? Nor do I really! But it sounds comforting and philosophical, and if repeated a sufficient number of times, it carries persuasion. As for me looking tired, why you yourself do not seem much better for your holiday."

"I think I have undertaken rather too much work," Nora said. "It is overtaxing me a little — nothing to speak of, though, for I am so strong."

"Don't become fashionable and have a breakdown," her friend said. "And now, before I go, tell me about your holiday and Nurse Isabel and Mr Uppingham. I want to hear all about him. Did you lose your heart to him? You wrote very enthusiastically of him."

"I don't know whether I have lost my heart to him," Nora said, half-dreamily. "I should be very glad if I had. I have never in my life liked any one so much. But . . ."

She was going to say, "But I am not free." She stopped herself.

"But I suppose if I had lost my heart to him," she said, with sudden brightness, "I should not be in any doubt about the matter."

"No, probably not," Mrs Ellerton answered, laughing. "It is generally afterwards that the doubt comes. What about the other man — I forget his name?"

"He is a very curious man," Nora said. "I cannot shake him off. I am always thinking of him against my will."

"Ah, that's bad, unless you love him — and then it would not be against your will," Mrs Ellerton said, and her mind reverted to Madge Carson, and she was just going to speak of her, when Mr Ellerton arrived, and carried his wife off in a whirlwind of hurry. After they had gone, Nora stood looking out of the window and thinking of her genial little school-friend. The words echoed in Nora's ears:

"Perhaps you too will come to grief. Most women do some way or other." And her own answer was wafted back to her:

"Then I shall fulfil our common destiny."

And the next minute she thought of her dream, and shuddered. "Oh, this is ridiculous," she said, giving herself a mental shake. "As if one were not a free agent, and could not retain one's independence of spirit, — and in these days, too, when there is no mental court of Inquisition. I begin to think that I am passing through a phase of morbidness. I must brace myself up. It is not as though there were no one to help me. There is father. And there is — yes, there is Brian Uppingham, who has made me feel that he loves me, and whom I never see without a thrill of joy and hope and absolute belief. Why should I not go forth to meet him? There is not any barrier. It is only my morbid imagination. Like many other people, I am afraid to touch happiness — I, who have so laughed at half-heartedness and weak-minded hesitancy and inaneness! And now I am afraid myself. Or *is* there a barrier? Surely I can break through it if I choose. . . ."

A hansom cab drove slowly up to the door, and a great wave of pleasure encircled Nora.

"It is Mr Uppingham himself," she said, and all gloom fled from her.

She opened the door to him, and laughed with pleasure and amusement to see him laden with sundry parcels of a distinctly countrified calibre.

"A sack of vegetables, a pot of walnut pickle, some butter, and some cakes," he said, gravely. "I think that is all. No, I've forgotten the bottle of dandelion wine, of which I wish you joy, and a few dead trailing branches which Mrs Mary Shaw insisted sternly on my bringing to you without fail. And Reuben has sent you a bottle of medicine labelled '*For the shivers*' — something very special, I believe; and great-uncle sent you his blessing, and wished you to know that he had finished all his shag!"

"How well you look," Nora said, glancing at him in surprise. He seemed quite a different person from the delicate invalid whom she had left only a few weeks ago.

"I have been getting stronger by leaps and bounds," he said, as they sat together on the sofa. "I only came up from Graystoke yesterday. It was very lonely after you had gone. But I was determined to stay on and try in every way to recover some kind of health and strength for my work. The village people have amused me endlessly, and Mrs Mary Shaw has been most kind to me. My striking resemblance to that artist who never paid his bills, evidently quite endeared me to her."

He chatted on, telling her all the news about the King's Head and the Punchbowl and the ancestors, and giving her all the kindly messages with which he had been charged from many sides. He was so happy to be with her once more, and showed his gladness without any attempt at concealment. It shone out with a great warmth and golden light. He had not weakened his power of loving by frittering it away; he had it, therefore, unimpaired in strength and purity, with a freshness

which lent it all the greater charm, because it was the freshness of a wise and pure heart. He did not use words of love to Nora, but the quiet way in which he gave evidence of how much he needed her, and of how much she had already become to him in his daily life, was more convincing than any eloquence of protestation. Nora saw it and recognised it, and a thrill went through her.

"I have a great deal to tell you about the progress of the book," he said. "I have all sorts of new ideas for it. But first I want to show you something. I know it will interest you. It is my poor little Thyra's certificate for the London Matriculation. It came after her death, but even then I was proud of it."

Nora took the paper in her hands and looked at the name inscribed on it: *Thyra Uppingham.*

"You see she was only eighteen," he continued, pointing to the age recorded there. "That is very young to die."

"It seems a wanton waste to be called away at eighteen," Nora said.

"Yes," he answered, as he half caressed the document, "that is what I have said in the bitterness of my heart — such a wanton waste. And that is what I felt when I lost my friend — a noble fellow too, not a man whom the world could lightly spare. I suppose we all say that, when we lose those whom we have loved, and in whom we have believed with all our hearts. We know we are poorer, and we are convinced that the world is poorer too. And if our love is strong enough — and it generally is — we say it of the worthless ones as well. For whatever they may really be, they are not worthless to us, and we cannot conceive of them being worthless to other people. We go on believing to the very last in

their possibilities, and when the end has come, it is in the remembrance of their possibilities that we take what pride we may, saying always with unfaltering faith that the world is the poorer for having lost them. But when there is no question in our own hearts or in the hearts of others about the worth of our dear dead ones — when they showed sure signs of what they were going to do and be, to make us prouder and the world richer — is there any comfort that we can take over the wanton waste of beautiful material? I don't know of any, except our own tender thankfulness that they belonged to us, that they were our very own. That is some comfort, a poor one, but human enough, and therefore not ignoble."

"Only it does not really suffice," Nora said.

"Oh no, it does not suffice, of course," he said, "but there seems to be no choice between absolute starvation and feeding on fancy-bread, which just stays off the sinking, but does not still the real hunger pangs of yearning. Nothing can still that for us: not the finest doctrine or dogma, though we may saturate ourselves through and through with its meaning and promises, and almost persuade ourselves that we *are* comforted."

He folded up the certificate, and turned to her with a smile.

"And yet such strange creatures of impulse and irresponsibility are we," he said, "that even those of us who pride ourselves on having left the low-lying plains of tradition and religious romance and fable, find our way back to the old haunts which we had vowed never to revisit. We wander gladly over the fields and through the sheltered lanes, picking sweet-scented things from the hedges. We cannot help ourselves: we are driven there again and again by some force which may be simply the resultant of all the influences at work during

the centuries gone by, or else our own soul's innate necessity, something altogether independent of time and creed and imitation. So I find myself re-fashioning my little Thyra, watching her career in her new world, and still expecting her to make her mark in her chosen work, with freer conditions, keener gifts, and strengthened abilities, and wider scope. She will be a good doctor yet, I think, and will discover some rare remedy for which her name will be beloved through all the ages. You see I am ambitious for her even now: I can't help myself — and I cannot help telling you."

"I am so very glad that you care to tell me," Nora said, warmly.

The ring of truth in her voice was like music to him. It called him out of the realms of regret and sadness into a fairyland of light and love and hope. He had passed on, as we all of necessity must. He looked at her admiringly, and felt a sudden access of happiness in her presence, and an access of certainty too, that sooner or later he might claim her as his own.

"Ah," he said, "do you remember me telling you that I had nothing to live for? The words were scarcely out of my mouth before I knew that the something had come."

She turned away from him, and an anxious look passed over her face, as though of an inward strife. Brian had seen that shadow before. He was soon to know, only too well, what it meant.

They sat together after that, talking not of Death and the pathos of our strained efforts to comfort ourselves in some irreparable loss, but of active life, bounding ambition, restless endeavour, Little Englanders, Big Englanders, and, finally, the standing of women in the new spheres, and the question of a fair wage in return for her services. Nora was very keen on that subject, and

expressed great indignation that women should still be paid less, in England at least, for precisely the same kind of work done by men at a considerably higher rate of remuneration.

She said:

"That question of a lower wage for a woman, based on the sole reason of her being a woman, and not necessarily of her being an inferior worker, always stirs me up a good deal, probably because it comes home to me with peculiar directness. As a teacher, for instance, certificated, and with every right, so far as academic *cachet* goes, to be paid as well as a man who has taken a poorer degree and has less teaching ability than myself, I nevertheless cannot ever expect to attain to his salary, given the same conditions, of course. And moreover the idea is so burnt into all our brains, male and female too, that we can get very little help from our own sex. It is not so long ago that one of our most advanced women — a well-known speaker on social subjects — applied to me to give her Latin lessons at starvation price, and wished to bring a friend to share the instruction with her. I think she offered two shillings the hour. I told her that the fee was too small, and that it was not usual to teach two people for the price of one. She said that she was sorry for her mistake, but she understood that lady professors charged less than men."

"Well," Brian said, "it is just another illustration of what we spoke of before, that women have not cared enough to help themselves or each other. It is always astonishing to me how little they have cared. A few, of course, have cared tremendously; but the masses have remained indifferent, and would continue so now, if it were not for the rousing of the plucky ones."

"I don't admit that," Nora said. "I think it is only

that we are still hampered by custom and prejudice. I do not believe for one moment that women are indifferent, or unwilling to help each other. But we have to learn. We need our apprenticeship, like all workmen who are going to be worth anything."

"Well," Brian answered, "you know I am as much a woman's advocate as you are, but I honestly believe that the greater number of your sex are still quite indifferent. Take this very question of payment, to which you have referred. No one can drive a harder bargain with a woman than a woman, especially the highly moral and sanctimonious woman. I should not be surprised to hear that it is a woman who suggests post-office and other Government economies!"

"You should write a brochure about these subjects," Nora said.

"You are making fun of me," he said, reproachfully.

"No indeed, I am not," she answered. "After all, no one can help women so much as men — if they choose. And even in these modern times, it is a rare thing to find a man who is generous and just enough to give to women the full benefit and help of his man's way of looking at things. As a rule, men are content to use women, and then laugh at their limitations and mistakes, and then say, 'There, I told you so — thus far and no farther.'"

"You should write the brochure yourself," he said; but she shook her head, and they passed on to the subject of his own book.

"I have been going straight ahead with it," he said, "pretending to believe in myself, and sometimes almost succeeding. I have had no relapses into depression. I must write and tell Nurse Isabel that. She is away on the Continent with her famous nerve-specialist, with

whom she appears to be having a duller time than she had with me."

"I have a real affection for Nurse Isabel," Nora said. "I so often think of her quaint sayings. I hope she will soon be home again."

"I have every reason to be thankful to her," Brian said. "I would do anything for Nurse Isabel. She brought you into my life. And . . ."

"Ah, it's the historian!" said a cheery voice of welcome, and Roger Penhurst came into the room. "Greeting to you and good luck! Let's have dinner at once, Nora, my girl, and we'll drink a quart of champagne, and pretend that we are old friends. That is the way, Mr. Uppingham, to begin a friendship with a visitor who is as welcome as yourself!"

CHAPTER III

OUT OF HARMONY

But in spite of the pleasure which Nora felt in being with Brian Uppingham, she did not lose the sensation of uneasiness about Theodore Bevan, whom she had dismissed so summarily; and as the days went by and she had no news of him, she began to be quite restless and distracted. She could not reason herself out of this state of mind, although she made several valiant attempts. At last, one evening, when she was sitting alone preparing a lesson on Prometheus Vinctus, the bell rang, and Nora looked up from her books. Her father had gone to a lecture on 'Human Origins,' and she had not felt inclined to accompany him. He seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of brain-strength, and could apply his mind to anything he wished, and at any moment. Nora could not keep pace with him, and lately she had been feeling listless. So she stopped at home, and did her work in a half-hearted sort of way, until the bell rang, and Theodore Bevan came into the cosy sitting-room.

"Good evening," he said, smiling gravely. "I am lucky to find you in."

"Good evening," Nora said, curiously relieved that he had come, and yet astonished too, for she had never asked him to visit her. There were signs of both feelings in her greeting to him, but the first predominated.

"I should have come before," he continued, "but that I have been prevented by pressure of work in the first instance, and then by the suicide of a friend."

"The suicide of a friend!" Nora said, shocked.

"Yes," he answered, as he sank down in the easy-chair. "With a shadow like that upon one, one may well feel that life is a hideous affair. I have never been in love with life, as you know, and this evening, feeling more than ever out of conceit with it, my steps led naturally to you for exhortation and healthy reprimand."

"Tell me about it," Nora said, kindly, and her heart went out to him in his trouble. He looked frail and suffering, and wore an ashen look, peculiar to those stricken by a shocking tragedy.

"There is nothing much to tell," he said, quietly. "He was a successful man, a solicitor, in good health, and with no reason for courting death, but he killed himself deliberately about an hour before I and another friend had an appointment with him in his rooms. We found him there. I shall miss him greatly. I talk at random sometimes about the vanity of love and friendship; but words can be tossed so easily off the lips, whilst feelings remain deep down in the heart. I was very much attached to him, and shall find it difficult to face the loneliness which would seem to be my peculiar portion. Looking through my journal, a record of my own thoughts, intended for no eyes but mine, I find no single word set down that could be distorted into a harsh criticism of him, much less an unsympathetic one, and still less an expression of distrust. And that is saying a good deal — even of a friend."

Nothing could have been kinder than the gentle way in which she took care of him. She was touched that he should have cared to come to her in his trouble, and grieved to see him looking so forlorn and shaken. She felt glad that he had found his way to her home, and was sitting in the cosy living-room, amongst the books

and musical instruments and pictures of poets and musicians. He glanced around, and appeared to take comfort from his surroundings. He warmed his hands by the fireside, shook his head when Nora suggested supper; but at last, persuaded by her, drank of the tea which she prepared, and even managed to eat a little food. The strained expression on his face relaxed somewhat, a sure sign that greater ease of mind and spirit was stealing over him. There was no mistaking the genuineness of his trouble, and of his gratitude to Nora for her sympathy. He sat there, pathetic in his trustfulness, like some sick child who knows that he is being well looked after. So the evening passed, Nora trying to divert his thoughts, and he listening and joining in at times, and speaking more frankly about himself than he had ever done before, and showing a simple and even lovable side of his nature. At last Mr Penhurst came home, brimming over with excitement about "Human Origins." When he saw Theodore Bevan installed in an easy-chair by the fireside, he stood still for a moment and turned to Nora, as though for an explanation. But he was too genuinely kind to make her or any one uncomfortable; and so, with sufficient politeness, he said good evening to the unwelcome visitor, talked about the lecture, and wondered inwardly when on earth the little confounded centipede intended to take himself off. It was nearly twelve o'clock when Bevan rose to go, and even then it seemed an effort to him to leave Nora's home and presence.

"You have been very good to me," he said, looking straight at her. "I came here quite broken. You have restored me."

Mr Penhurst saw him to the door, gave him a gracious enough "good night" and an inward kick and

returned to the room, where he found Nora leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Nora," he said, roughly, "now I understand why you did not care to come to the lecture. You expected this fellow, and stayed at home for him."

Nora flushed crimson with anger at the injustice of the accusation.

"I did not expect him at all," she said, warmly. "I simply did not wish to go to that lecture. One cannot always feel inclined for 'Human Origins.' And as for hiding anything from you, have we ever been on those terms? You know perfectly well that I should have told you."

"I don't know anything of the sort now," he said, his anger rising. "You are so changed."

"You've no right to say that," Nora answered, angrily. "Mr Bevan came here of his own accord, or else I should have told you beforehand. I'm not a kitchen-maid, that I desire to do things surreptitiously. He came here uninvited, and I am very glad he did come. He is in great trouble about the suicide of his friend, and I am happy to have been able to comfort him."

"A pity it is not his own suicide," Roger Penhurst flung out. "I should be delighted to hear of that."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, father," Nora said hotly. "The man has done you no harm."

"Oh," said Roger Penhurst, now quite out of temper, "don't you take up that tone of superiority with me, for I'm damned if I'll stand it. I tell you that man is detestable to me, and if you are going to have him here, you must choose between me and him. I shall not trouble myself to speak of this again, and you must just please yourself. I don't care."

He snatched up his book and slippers, and went quickly out of the room and upstairs into his study. Nora heard him bang his door. Then all was still. Ten minutes afterwards her father's door was opened, and she heard the sound of his footsteps on the stairs. She did not move an inch; her heart did not give one bound, as on other occasions when she and he had had some quarrel, and were only too grateful to hasten back to the old tenderness.

He came into the room, but she did not come forward to meet him.

"Nora, my girl," he said, "I can't rest without saying that I am very sorry for having been so crusty. Of course I believe that you did not ask him here — of course I believe your word. Why, there never has been any back-handedness between us. It was just my temper, nothing more. I don't know why I should dislike that man. I'll try all over again. I'll — "

He stopped suddenly, for Nora's silence and cold unresponsiveness of manner chilled him.

"Well, good night, dear," he said, sadly, and she let him go without a word.

CHAPTER IV

WORDS OF WARNING

One day in the middle of January, Nora went down to the Eagle Club, where she had arranged to meet some of her friends. They thought that she looked a little out of health, and that she seemed listless. She was, in fact, torn to pieces by her conflicting feelings about the two men who had come almost simultaneously into her life. They both visited her, but they had never yet met at her house. Her father continued to dislike Mr Bevan, and to resent his presence, and to be more and more drawn towards the historian. Nora did not wonder at that and wished that her own mind was not so full of strife. Engrossed with these thoughts which seldom left her, she sat almost silent in a remote corner of the room, and only woke up to some degree of brightness, when the President came up to her and began to tell her about her travels in the Far West. Nora said that she had always had the desire to go out to some distant land, and for the sake of the experience live in some unsettled part of the country, away from the trammels of culture and civilisation.

Mrs Carew smiled.

"I had three years of that kind of life in Texas," she said. "And when at last my husband and I were able to break loose from the trammels of a cattle-ranch, we gladly came home to culture and civilisation. You would do the same too. For a permanency it must be death to any one who has known another kind of

existence, but for a time I think it is invaluable. I returned to England with a better understanding of all that the old country has to offer; and my powers of appreciation have grown stronger ever since. If you are needing a thorough change and rest, go there. There is a great attraction about the life. It gives you a sense of expanse and freedom which you never quite lose. It makes everything in Nature, Art, Letters, and Life stronger and broader for you."

She was then called away from Nora, much to the latter's disappointment. She had an intense admiration for the President, harbouring for her that peculiar kind of reverent affection which can only be given by a woman to a woman, and is a lovely thing—"a joy for ever."

She was still thinking of her when another friend, Miss Sandhurst, brought a Miss Margaret Carson, who wanted to be introduced to her.

Nora started at the name. She remembered that Nurse Isabel had mentioned it to her in connection with Theodore Bevan, and she was at once filled with an unaccountable irritation which she could scarcely conceal. But Madge Carson was too much in earnest to mind that.

"Miss Penhurst," she said, eagerly, "I want so very much to speak with you. I have something which I must say to you. I will come to your house if you will allow me, or else I should be glad if you would come to my rooms, which are within a stone's throw of the British Museum."

Nora had drawn herself up somewhat coldly.

"I have not said whether or not I care to hear what you are so desirous of telling me, Miss Carson," she answered. "You should at least say why you wish to see me so particularly."

"I want to speak to you about Mr Theodore Bevan," Madge Carson said.

"I do not think I care to hear," Nora replied. "You are quite a stranger to me, and I do not see how any concerns of yours can possibly interest me."

Madge Carson flushed crimson: she was a proud little lady.

"I am fully aware that I sacrifice my own dignity in asking you to grant me an interview against your own inclination, Miss Penhurst," she said. "It is not agreeable to put oneself in the position of being snubbed, and I should not subject myself to the risk of such unpleasantness, but that I am constrained by my own strong feelings. So I still ask you to give me half an hour of your time for private talk."

Nora looked at her, noticed the flush of annoyance on her face, and the quiet earnestness of her manner, and the keenness of her brown eyes. They were sad eyes, too, and brave ones.

"I am in your neighbourhood to-morrow afternoon, Miss Carson," she said, in a softened tone of voice, "and will be with you about four o'clock. I am sorry I was so ungracious."

The next afternoon, being Saturday, she worked in the reading-room of the British Museum, talked with her old Professor, but was interrupted by Theodore Bevan, whom she found waiting to take her to lunch. He was constantly in attendance on her now, both at home and in town. She was not quite sure whether she was not irritated by such close companionship, which did not leave her free for her old habits and inclinations. Once or twice she thought of speaking to him about it, but her heart failed her when she came to the point. To-day, however, she made a deter-

mined effort for freedom, and knocked at Margaret Carson's rooms punctually at four o'clock. Miss Carson opened the door for her, and welcomed her with a grave smile. Nora glanced around at the bookbinding tools, the sewing-bench and plough and press, the designs for book-covers hung about everywhere, and a littered table where a beautifully-bound book lay, fresh from the artist's hands.

"Oh, Miss Carson," Nora said, enthusiastically, "what delightful work! May I touch this?"

Margaret Carson put the delicate volume in her hands, and stood by, proud as any true worker should be of true appreciation.

"I am going to bind a copy of this book for Mrs Carew's birthday," she said, after a pause. "Do you know it? I was looking at it again to-day, and a passage which I have marked there, struck me with redoubled force."

"'We prate eloquently enough,'" she read aloud, "'of the advantage and advisability of frankness in our intercourse with other people. We are never tired of pointing out that true frankness, not necessarily associated with boorishness, simplifies life to an astonishing extent. But even those of us who have the courage to be frank with other people, are seldom plucky enough to be frank with ourselves. We do not care to call things by their proper names; and our own mistakes, failings, stubbornnesses, rashnesses, and errors of judgment are christened with some such elegant term as "fortune's blows." If we are cowards, we just pretend to ourselves that we have shrinking dispositions. It sounds better.'"

She stopped, and put the book down.

"It is so true," she said, turning to Nora. "All this morning I have been a positive coward about this inter-

view with you which I sought of my own free will, and I have consoled myself by thinking of my 'shrinking disposition.' Then I happened to take up that book. The writer of it always helps me. I always think of him with a peculiar kind of personal gratitude. I read his book during a time of great trouble, when I had lost all my bearings — and this is the subject about which I wanted to speak to you, Miss Penhurst."

She was leaning against her work-table, fiddling with one of her tools, and Nora was resting in the arm-chair, playing with her chain. Her stately presence and frigidity of manner made the little bookbinder nervous, but she was determined not to shrink from the task which she had undertaken.

"Miss Penhurst," she said, taking the plunge, after a moment's awkward silence, during which Nora did not help her, "I have nothing to gain by speaking to you about Theodore Bevan. It is not that I wish to vent my spleen, or satisfy any absurd desire for revenge on a man who really spoilt four or five years of what ought to have been the brightest time of my life. All the bombastic part of my feelings has passed away, but a sincere conviction remains that it is my duty to warn others against him."

"It is very disinterested of you, I am sure," Nora said, sarcastically.

"Yes, it is," Margaret Carson said; "especially when I feel that it won't be of the slightest use. But I can't help that. I only know that I would penetrate even into palaces to tell my story. And," she added, a little quaintly, "I don't suppose I should feel any less awkward there than here, for you do not help me out."

"I don't see how I can," Nora answered; but her voice sounded kinder, and Margaret Carson took heart

and gathered herself together. There was nothing vicious nor exaggerated in her relation of the simple story which she told. She was singularly frank, blaming herself for her want of ordinary perception, and her stubbornness, and her flattered vanity. She said that Theodore Bevan came into her life at a time when she had just finished her college-career, and was pausing before taking up any definite active work, often a very difficult time for those who are not obliged by circumstances to begin earning money at once. She had all her days free to do whatever she chose, and the result was that she felt too dull to do anything. Then Theodore Bevan and she became acquainted, and he was kind in lending her books and interesting her in the current literature of the day, of which she knew nothing. She said that at first she never really liked him, and that he always produced in her a feeling of distress and anxiety, and that she was always conscious that his influence was not a healthy one. Certainly, from the moment she began to be a great deal with him, her way of looking at life changed; her healthy happiness passed from her, her belief in people's single-heartedness weakened, and a mean-spirited, critical cynicism, at which she now laughed, took the place of her own natural delight in whatever was grand and great. She tried to free herself from him, but he seemed to hold her as though in a vice, and as time went on, she made no more struggles to break loose from him: she did not wish to break loose, for he chained her by appealing silently to her sympathy and by flattering her vanity. He deplored his own bitterness of character, but told her repeatedly that since he had learnt to know her, he took a gentler view of every one and everything.

"And I was fool enough to believe that I was influ-

encing him," she said. "I remember some mysterious words of his which impressed me deeply: '*Every time I leave you, the same words always rise to my lips, and when alone I speak them aloud.*'"

Nora started. She recognised those words.

"I used, of course, to think he uttered some kind of benediction for my chastening influence," Madge Carson continued; "but I suppose what he really said was, 'Little fool — I'm taming you well.'"

She paused a moment, and seemed wrapt in her own thoughts.

"That was what he cared for most in life," she went on — "to tame people, to take firm hold of their minds, analyse them, find out their weaknesses, distort their virtues, and leave their mental and moral individuality in ruins. He did not trouble himself about the physical. That was not his bent. But I have no hesitation in saying that a man like Theodore Bevan, who aims deliberately at ruining a woman's mind, and corroding it with his poison, is a greater enemy to society than that notoriously bad fellow, Gerald Hamilton, who was turned out of our club a few weeks ago. One knows pretty well where one is drifting with a man of Hamilton's type, but one loses all one's bearings with the Theodore Bevans of the world. I know it has taken me three or four years to find them again — and hard years too."

"I think that you exaggerate Mr Bevan's peculiarities," Nora said. "You probably did not read him aright. He is certainly eccentric, and not every one would be likely to understand him."

Madge Carson laughed.

"Understand him!" she said. "And who would be likely to understand him?"

"I do," answered Nora.

"Then I congratulate you," Madge Carson replied, ironically. "I was not so lucky. I saw Theodore Bevan nearly every day for about two years, and never learnt to read him aright."

"That is not unusual," said Nora. "People have been known to live fifty years side by side, and to have died strangers to each other. It is only the few who understand."

But Madge Carson did not heed her.

She took up a lovely little old volume, looked at it half unconsciously, and held it in her hands.

"In fact," she continued, more to herself than to Nora, "for the last year I saw no one else but him. He arranged that. He weaned me away from all my old friends and my old pleasures, and brought discord between me and my dear old aunt, who could not bear the sight of him. He made me behave shamefully to her. He and I together spoilt the peace and comfort of the last year of her life. I realised that when it was too late. I lost two or three of my best friends through him. Every one except me seemed to dislike and distrust him. And even I had my changing moods about him; but whenever I doubted him the most, and wished to be free of him, and take a long breath of fresh air, and feel my nature as well as my lungs expand once more, he invariably arrived at the right moment, as though by divination, and swept away all traces of any unfavourable feeling towards him. I always noticed that about him. It was most remarkable."

Nora looked up at the little figure standing before her.

"I have noticed that too," she said, hastily.

"Ah," said Madge Carson, with quiet triumph, "I am glad to hear it."

Nora bit her lip. She was vexed with herself for

having said that much, and she betrayed it in her manner as she rose to go. She had not intended to show that she had been impressed with anything which Madge Carson had said; and yet one or two of the remarks struck home. She now drew herself together and turned stiffly to Madge Carson.

"I am sure you have meant to do a kind action in speaking so openly to me," she said. "I am very sorry for your unfortunate experience, and I am much obliged to you for wishing to save me from a similar one. I shall, of course, tell Mr Bevan that I have seen you, for it is only fair that he should know that you have given me your personal impressions of him. I am quite sure you have drawn what you think to be a truthful picture of him. But, of course, everything depends on the point of view. I shall be seeing him to-morrow, or perhaps to-night. Shall I give any message from you? Have you anything you wish to say to him?"

"Tell him that I am glad he has found some one to understand him," Madge Carson said, spitefully. "It must be such a comfort."

CHAPTER V

NURSE ISABEL TAKES AN OUTING

NURSE ISABEL, who had been away on the Continent for several weeks, returned to town about the middle of March, and one day, punctually at the hour of two, she entered Burlington House and found Brian Uppingham waiting for her. He had written to suggest a meeting, saying that although, according to her verdict, he was not particularly interesting, yet, judged by the same infallible authority, he was probably one degree less dull than her present patient, and therefore an hour or two of his company might be beneficial to her well-known depression.

"Goodness!" she said, when she saw him, "you do look well. I am so glad."

"I got better directly you left me," he answered. "My improvement was almost as miraculous as though I had taken a patent medicine and recovered from a life-long illness in about half a minute."

Nurse Isabel laughed.

"Well, you are grateful!" she said. "But at your worst you were never as troublesome as my famous nerve-specialist. However, he will soon be out of my hands. I can imagine him sitting in his consulting-room, in the odour of medical sanctity, surrounded by his quiet-looking books and papers, and saying in an irritatingly measured tone of voice to some overwrought visitor: 'My dear sir, we have to learn to control ourselves — to use moderation in everything. If we stretch the string beyond its power of tension, it breaks.' He has not been talk-

ing in that well-balanced way lately, I can tell you, and he has given me a great deal of trouble about his food. Also, it has been a considerable strain on me to behave like a saint the whole time, and not show any signs of impatience and boredom."

"Yes, I expect it has," Brian said; "and it has told on you. And I suppose you have not been able to wear your tailor-made gown fastened at the back with twenty-four obstinate little buttons?"

"That is reserved for lay patients," Nurse Isabel said. "It would not be suitable for the faculty! But don't let us talk about anything in connection with my beautiful profession. I'm out of conceit with it."

"You never could have been in conceit with it," he answered. "You are about as well fitted for it as Aunt Rebeccah Renaldson at the King's Head."

"You have an awful contempt for me," she said, laughing, half-heartedly. "I don't wonder. I have felt rather ridiculous to myself since you pointed out the fact to me."

"Oh, don't say that," he replied. "I am a tease by nature, and you do invite it."

"Yes, but the worst of it is that your remarks are nearly always appropriate," she answered. "I suppose you have what they call a keen perception, whatever that means. I was talking to my mother about you the other day when I went to see her, just before I undertook my present inspiring case, and she thinks you are hard on me. She doesn't think me ridiculous. But then she is prejudiced."

"And perhaps you have never nursed her," suggested Brian. "That makes a good deal of difference, you know!"

Nurse Isabel was fond of pictures, and in her light

way she quite enjoyed seeing this Exhibition of Old Masters. She went from room to room with untiring energy, and finally sank on to a sofa.

There was a "portrait of a lady" immediately before them, and it bore a striking likeness to Nora Penhurst. Nurse Isabel and Brian noticed the resemblance at once.

"You have seen her, of course?" Nurse Isabel asked.

"Oh yes," he answered, "and I expect to see her this evening."

"I hope she has got rid of that Mr Bevan," she said.

"I believe he has visited her several times since his return to town," Brian replied, with unconcern.

"Then why don't you show some spirit and turn him off the premises?" remarked Nurse Isabel. "If I were you, I would not have that horrid little creature sneaking about in my fairyland. It is your fairyland, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered. "I like to think so. But that does not give me the right to choose Miss Penhurst's acquaintances for her. I should not think much of a woman who would brook such interference from a stranger."

"Oh, what a goose you are!" she answered, tapping the sofa with her catalogue. "A woman likes being interfered with by the right man."

"Yes, but one must first be sure that one is the right man," Brian replied.

"And I suppose you will take a long time to find out," said Nurse Isabel, smiling. "You always were slow. Well, it is not my business, of course, but if you want any help in sending that little Bevan flying, do, I beg of you, ask me. Nothing would give me greater pleasure. I can't bear the thought of him existing even

on a desert by himself, and I certainly cannot bear the thought of him living anywhere within reach of any one whom I care for. I positively yearn to meet him again. Our last interview was such a success from my point of view. It has been quite a tonic to me during these last melancholy weeks which I have been devoting to my present patient. And that reminds me, that I must soon be getting back to him."

So they left Burlington House, and took tea at a Hungarian restaurant. They talked a great deal about Nora, and Brian said that he could not be thankful enough to Nurse Isabel for having asked her up to the Moat House.

"Oh, I must not take any credit for that," Nurse Isabel said, as she helped herself from a fresh instalment of dainty cakes. "I was tired of you, and wanted a good rest myself. You had been so terribly depressing that week, so overshadowed by the certainty that you were going to make a complete failure of your next book, that I really felt I could not put up with you any more. And I was delighted that Miss Penhurst thought it worth while to be bothered with you. How disappointed you will be if your new History-book does make a success. And what about the novel? That will be successful if you put me into it. I have always thought that I should make an excellent character for a novel — as the suffering, misunderstood heroine."

"Or as the cheerful, patient saint!" said Brian, smiling. "I am afraid, however, that I am quite unequal to the novel, but I am working very hard at the History-book. I have had no relapses into miseries, and I feel in capital health and spirits. Miss Penhurst listens to all my outpourings, and then I hasten home and work with all my heart and all my strength."

"Well, it suits you, evidently," Nurse Isabel said; and then the clock struck half-past three, and she rose reluctantly, saying that she must be home in good time for the faculty. Brian suggested that, on their way, they should buy a pair of elegant shoes to add to the wonderful assortment of which he still had a vivid recollection.

"A capital idea!" Nurse Isabel said. "Shoes always have an exhilarating effect on me!"

The shoes of course swallowed up an unconscionable time, but, as the historian said, it was absolutely necessary to get the right thing, in order to compensate her for the mortification of being deprived temporarily of the use of the tailor-made gown with the twenty-four buttons, and in order to give the famous nerve specialist a chance of enjoying a dose of her good spirits. After this important purchase, he hailed a hansom and took her to her destination.

"Good-bye," she said. "How good you have been to me. I have so enjoyed myself. I feel quite braced up for my saintlike duties."

Then she added mischievously:

"And how kind of you to spare the time from that wonderful History-book. Now do make haste to find out whether you are the right man; and don't forget that I am at your service when the time comes for sending that little Bevan flying!"

She rang the bell and passed upstairs to her room, with a smile on her face and a smile in her heart. She had had many outings with her men friends, but they were not people of Brian Uppingham's type, and the tone of the excursions had been different from this afternoon's pleasure. She recognised that.

"It makes one think better of oneself," she thought, "when a man like that goes out of his way and gives up

his time to be kind. Nora Penhurst will be an idiot if she refuses his love. I wish . . ."

She paused in the midst of trying on her new shoes, and sat still for a moment, a sad wistful little look coming into her eyes.

CHAPTER VI

THE NET TIGHTENS

NORA tried to forget her interview with Madge Carson, but the little bookbinder's words had an unpleasant way of echoing in her ears. And one day, when she was out in town with Theodore Bevan, she felt impelled to speak to him. She was so nervous about it that her opening words were abrupt.

"I have been warned against you," she said, with a little nervous laugh.

"Ah," he said, quietly, "I can quite believe that. I am not generally liked."

"A little lady called Madge Carson has warned me," continued Nora. "She appears to have a crusade against you."

"Ah," he said, "I am not surprised to hear that."

Then he continued:

"Madge Carson misunderstood me. She was a charming girl, but with a limited comprehension. I never claimed to be any better than the average man. She chose to consider me an exceptionally superior specimen of my elevated sex. But one day she found out her mistake, and having no sense of proportion, and no knowledge of moral geography, she at once relegated me to the bottom of the pit, where she probably desires to keep me. Perfectly legitimate from her point of view. I have nothing against her, except her terrible ignorance of geography, and her lamentable lack of the sense of proportion. When I remembered these deficiencies, I

became more reconciled to the loss of her friendship. But it took time. Still, I think I may say that my wounds are now healed. They were grievous ones."

Nora was so amazed at the manner in which he turned the tables on Madge Carson, that she found no words at her command.

"Also," continued Bevan, "a man has a perfect right to lift himself out of the pit to which he may have been unwittingly relegated. I claim that right, and I have passed on my way. I don't blame that little lady, nor any one with a limited comprehension. But if it had been you, I should have blamed you bitterly."

They walked on in silence. Nora was thinking that there was a great deal of justice in what he said; and his last sentence took the effect on her that had been intended.

"I thought it only fair to mention the matter to you," she said. "I listened to Miss Carson's story and complaints, and gathered that you had tried to influence her mind unhealthily, and separate her from her friends."

"If she felt that," he said, "it was right for her to put me out of her life. The only wonder is that she hesitated so long. If I felt that you were influencing me badly, do you suppose I should pause for one moment before dismissing you from my life? And take your own instance — why, you would never suffer any one to exercise an undue sway over your mind and character. You, like myself, would not hesitate."

"Perhaps she did not realise it at first," Nora said, half dreamily.

Then she added:

"Miss Carson sought this interview of her own free will, and I am afraid it was not a very satisfactory one from her point of view."

"It could not possibly have been satisfactory to her," he said, with quiet confidence. "You are too just to be disturbed by a one-sided representation of that kind. I am not much of a flatterer, as you know, but I have always considered that, unlike most of your sex, you were endowed with a fine sense of justice. So I can well understand that the little crusader went on her way defeated. Naturally enough, she has left doubts in your mind. But they will pass."

He looked up at her with his curious thin smile, and she smiled uneasily in return. She was uneasy. The mere fact that he took her allegiance to him as a matter of course, troubled rather than gratified her. Why should he be so sure of her? What had she done to make him feel that he could count on her? Where was that freedom of individuality on which he laid such stress for himself and herself and every one? And her sense of justice — how did that come in? Why should he assume that she desired to be just to him? All these thoughts rushed through her mind, and she would have given worlds to have found utterance for them. Yes, she would fain have told him, that some of the things which Madge Carson said, had struck home to her, though she pretended to ignore them. But her tongue seemed paralysed just at the moment when her mind was alert; and the opportunity slipped by.

"Yes," he repeated, "she has left doubts in your mind. But they will pass. If I did not feel sure of that, I could not now be speaking to you so calmly. For I know and have known of no one throughout my barren life whose good opinion I value more than I do yours. I cannot and will not do without it. Companionship with you is making me look at life with different eyes. I have found myself lately forgetting to analyse

people's motives and dissect their characters. I think of you with intense gratitude, for it is your work."

He paused, and then went on:

"When the strong fresh wind sweeps over us on the downs, we feel strengthened, purified, sweetened. You are to me that strong fresh wind."

They had been strolling through Hyde Park, and they now found themselves at the Marble Arch. Theodore Bevan pulled out his watch.

"I have just time to keep an appointment," he said, hurriedly. He took his leave, hailing a passing omnibus, and was gone almost before Nora realised that he was no longer walking by her side. She gave a long sigh. Was it of relief or regret? She scarcely knew; but when she reached home, Madge Carson had retreated into the background of her thoughts.

After this, Nora and Bevan were constantly together. He came to fetch her from her classes. Sometimes he met her at the station, and walked with her to her various destinations. Whenever she came out of the Museum reading-room, she would find that eccentric little figure waiting in the vestibule. On one occasion she discovered him occupying the seat next to her usual place in the reading-room. Her old friends seemed shy of her now. They had been accustomed to have her to themselves, and did not care to share her with this unaccountable little stranger. At first they tried to ignore and snub him. But they all found, when comparing notes, that Theodore Bevan could be neither ignored nor snubbed nor dismissed. On the contrary, it was he who ignored them. He never seemed to be aware of their bodily presence or their mental atmosphere. It was not that he recognised them as being in his company and put his foot on them; it was that he appeared always to re-

main insensible of them. They were all irritated against him, and gradually left off speaking to Nora when he was present. The Danish professor was the most persistent; but he too gave in at last. One day, however, when Nora was alone, he came up in his usual genial fashion, and they had some pleasant talk together. These two had had many agreeable hours of companionship, and Nora felt renovated in speaking to him again. He was always discovering some new genius who proved to be no genius at all.

"Ah," he said to-day, "I have at last found the poet of the century — splendid — magnificent!"

"And what have you done with the other glorious poet of the century?" asked Nora, laughing. "Have you buried him already?"

"Ah," he said, his grey eye twinkling, "you laugh at your old Professor. Very good. But you see, my fine young miss, genius is not so large a lump as it was. Many people nibble, nibble; and a little of the real lump comes off, and then we think at first it is the whole lump. But it isn't. But this poet — well, we must read him together. Come now. Ah, too late, *sapristi!* Here is Monsieur, your attendant. I must go at once. Adieu."

"But why must you go, Professor?" said Nora, almost pleadingly.

"My sweet young miss," he replied, "I could not tell you why, except that Monsieur requires the whole planet for himself. There is no fighting over it. The time has not yet come to fight for a whole planet. Monsieur would always conquer, for the simple truth that he is detestable, and people are glad to go. Well, then, adieu for the present, and we will speak of my new genius another time."

"Professor Frimodt," Nora said, "I wish you would stay. I assure you Mr Bevan does not mean to be unfriendly. He has eccentric ways, and an unprepossessing manner, and he suffers very much from being misunderstood."

"My sweet young lady," the Professor answered, fumbling at his spectacles, "I have tried the experience more often than is good for the stomach. It is not agreeable to feel an iceberg in one's inside. I go now. *Au revoir.*"

That was only one of many cases in which Nora's friends began to fall away from her. Once or twice she had attempted to retain them; and afterwards she let them go. At first they had made laughing and teasing allusions to her *constant attendant;* but she, who was generally good-tempered enough in her way, and rather fond of fun and banter, had drawn herself up stiffly, and intimated by her manner that they had gone too far with her. So they shrugged their shoulders, passed on their way, and pronounced her inscrutable. They discussed her, of course, but not uncharitably. They spoke of her as Una with her little rat. But Bevan himself was generally known as Miss Penhurst's turnkey: justly enough too, for he was certainly locking up her mind, and depriving her of all free play. Various complaints reached her, but she did not seem to heed them.

"We never see you," her more intimate friends said. "Are you never coming again to the Debating Club? Won't next week's subject tempt you — 'The Wages of Women'?"

But she shook her head.

"I'm rather tired," she said, "and I think I don't care much about debates."

And others said:

"You look wretchedly ill, so unlike your old self."

"Thank you," she answered, "I am all right, but rather listless. One cannot always be screwed up to concert-pitch. I think I am rather tired of teaching."

"You used to be so enthusiastic about teaching," some one said.

"Yes, I believe I was," she answered. "Unfortunately enthusiasms do not last."

Several of her pupils failed in their examinations, and she knew it was her fault. She had not given of her best to them at the time when they needed the final pushing on. Her History lectures, too, always considered particularly brilliant and interesting, had fallen off in quality. In the same week two of her Principals spoke to her. One of them complained about her lectures and her Greek classes.

"You are not yourself," she said, kindly, "and I think it would be better for you to take a short rest and come back to us fresh again. I can put Miss Richmond into your place temporarily. You see, you have accustomed us to the best of everything. We cannot do with a second best from you."

Nora yielded up her post without attempting to excuse herself. The other Principal complained of the constant presence of Mr Bevan in the immediate vicinity of the school.

"I am not in the least a prude," she said, "but I do not care to have my teachers brought to school and fetched away habitually by their gentleman friends. It leads to comment first among the children, and through them, amongst the parents; and parents are troublesome enough without being given any additional opportunity for grumbling."

That was all she said, and she asked no questions. It was her theory that a head-mistress had no special right

to penetrate into the private life of her teachers, and she was vexed that Nora had given her occasion to complain at all.

"I am very sorry," Nora said. "I cannot tell you how sorry I am. It shall not occur again."

But it did occur again, for Theodore Bevan forgot her strict injunctions, and, a week afterwards, appeared as usual outside the school.

"Ah, I had forgotten," he said, when she remonstrated. "My great necessity drove me to you."

"I wish your great necessity had kept you at home," she said, with a little of her old spirit.

"You are very hard on me sometimes," he said, humbly.

She left him then and there, and found her way to the Principal's private room, and told her that her promise had been broken.

"I have just been told," the head-mistress said, scanning her, "but I am glad you came yourself. I think I ought to ask you now who this man is, and why you cannot carry out my wishes. Are you engaged to him?"

"No," said Nora, absently. "We have just drifted into companionship."

"Is not that rather dangerous on the whole?" said the Principal, kindly. "One may drift anywhere."

"Oh, I think one is always drifting," Nora said, shrugging her shoulders.

"That is the language of Indifference," the Principal said. "It is not your real tongue. I have always valued you as being one of my brightest and most healthy-minded teachers. Don't disappoint me now after three years of entire satisfaction."

Nora went home wounded in her pride, and wrote

Theodore Bevan a hasty letter, which she regretted after it had been sent. His answer was characteristic, and ended thus: —

"And for the rest, what may I plead in excuse for my unpardonable thoughtlessness? I fear, indeed, that my only excuse must needs be my own abominable selfishness. I have been so accustomed all my lonely life to make for what I wanted, irrespective of any one or any thing, that my gentler and more unselfish possibilities are scarcely yet at my command. Forgive me. I am already punished very severely in that I have wounded you and caused you to think impatiently of me.

"THEODORE BEVAN."

For several days after this episode, Nora saw nothing of Theodore Bevan. He was neither at the Museum nor outside the school; neither did he propose any meetings in town, nor did he come to her home. Roger rejoiced in his absence; but as he had got into the habit of going out in order to avoid the little man, whom he disliked intensely, Nora was nearly always left alone. Once she asked her father to stay at home, and he all but flung off his hat and slipped into the arm-chair. But his pride prevented him, for he was wounded to the quick by her obstinacy over this stranger, and by her indifference to his own mental comfort and happiness. So he said:

"I think I don't care about staying at home. And, you see, you will be having your friend. He will, of course, come, and you know I dislike him. We have threshed all that out, and we don't agree. Well then, I will be off."

"Father," she cried, holding out her arms.

He did not hear, and he passed out of the house. But if she could only have known it, he came back and

lingered outside, and even took the latch-key from his pocket. Then he changed his mind, and went away. And if he could only have glanced into the room, he would have seen Nora bending over his portrait, the tears streaming down her cheeks. Father and daughter nearly reached each other that evening.

CHAPTER VII

ANOTHER PAGE FROM A JOURNAL

"It is indeed strange that I, of all people, should have become a prey to jealousy. Until lately, I never regarded Athene as serving any purpose except that of a new basis for investigation and conquest. But now, for the first time in my life, I begin to feel that I care for some one — I believe that I am learning to care for Athene.

"Love? Ah, love is a large word. I do not pretend to reach that. I began in my usual way by trying to influence her character. A woman of her education and environment had never before come into my horizon; and I felt that it would be amusing and instructive to find out whether my curiously subtle power over women's natures and minds could be extended to any one like herself, apparently well-balanced and robust-minded, and armed, both by temperament and inheritance, against an unhealthy onslaught. To me, whose one passion in life has been the exercise of this my birthright, my one undoubted compensation for many deprivations, the experiment was a specially tempting one.

"It has been entirely successful — almost too successful, so far as my poor Athene is concerned. My poor Athene! When I first saw her, she seemed to me like a ship in full sail, riding buoyantly over the ocean of life. The temptation to wreck her was irresistible. Then I came, and lo! her sails torn, her mast broken, and her destination forgotten. And I — where do I stand? In injecting my own mind's poison into her

system, I have injured myself. In amusing myself in forcing her into bondage, I have myself become a bondsman. This has never happened to me before. I smile to think it should ever have happened to me — to me, accustomed to a cool and constant control and understanding of my own passions, and impulses, and emotions. But that Uppingham coming on the scenes has thrown me off my balance. Every time he has been to see her, my power over her has sustained an injury. I have noticed this particularly. Then I have tightened my hold again and drawn her back to me, and I have rejoiced at my triumph over him and her. For in her heart of hearts she loves him; and he loves her. I only stand between them. But I will stand between them. He shall not have her. Athene is mine. How dare he suppose that he can thwart me!

"I, jealous! Ah, how my old self must be scoffing at my new self! For there can be no jealousy where there is merely indifference. If we are indifferent to people, it matters little enough to us what they do or think or feel; whom they love or whom they hate; whether their countenances brighten up at the approach of some one other than ourselves, or whether their hearts sink when they are left lonely, and deprived of the soothing or stimulating influence of a congenial mind. But when we are not indifferent to all that, when it wounds — at first only slightly, and then more painfully, and then acutely — we may be said to be jealous. There is a jealous love and a jealous hate. But I do not hate my poor Athene. It is not hatred, and it is not indifference, and therefore it must be love — as much love as a nature like mine could be capable of. For I know my limits. Still, everything being so relative in life, I suppose for me it *is* love. Oh, of course she does not love me: I

have never been able to inspire love. . . . If I could once have instilled the merest fraction of affection into any one — man, woman, dog — anything — I might have been a happier man and a better one too. If Athene could love me with the merest shadow of the true feeling, there might yet be a chance for me. But that is not possible. I have drawn her to me against her own will, separated her from mental contact with all her old friends, placed an invisible barrier between herself and her father, between herself and her would-be lover, between herself and her very life's work. And she is drifting towards me because she cannot resist my power. If I choose, she will become my affianced wife, because she cannot resist my power. If I choose, she will yield herself to me and forego the name of wife, simply because she cannot resist my power. Athene is mine, not by choice but by fate. She has fought a gallant fight against me, but from the first it was of no avail, for I had made up my mind.

"Elopement — a vulgar pastime indeed.

"Marriage — well, why not? And she might learn to care for me . . . who knows? And I, being cared for ever so little, might change and soften and 'go softly all my days.' Uppingham shall not come between us. I, jealous! What a curious entry to make in my journal! . . . So Madge Carson has ventured to warn my Athene. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

A CONFESSION OF LOVE

NURSE ISABEL'S words rang in Brian Uppingham's ears: —

"It *is* your fairyland, isn't it?"

Yes, it was his fairyland. He had recognised it at once, and entered it without any doubt or delay. And living there, all its gracious influences were telling on him. Joy was carolling in his heart, and with love and happiness as the levers of life, ambition had returned to him tenfold renewed. Old interests claimed him once more, new interests clamoured for him. He awoke to outside things. The events of the world held him. He had broken through the barriers of illness and indifference, and found his way into the open plains. For his fairyland was not a dell nor a deep sheltered lane. It was a great expanse with fine strong air blowing, and bracing him up to effort, rightful expression, fulfilment, and love.

He scarcely knew himself when he rose in the mornings. No longer impeded by physical weakness against which it had been impossible to fight, no longer repressed by sorrows and regrets of the past, he took up his life once more, and found it a beautiful gift. To the past belonged the things of the past, the joys and satisfactions, the failures and accomplishments; and now the future was his, a great far-stretching plain, immense in its possibilities.

He said: "I will do this. I will do that."

He said: "I have thought this. I have thought that. And now I will put it into words. I will press forward without any fear. I will believe in myself. I have the right to believe in myself. Because I have succeeded once, I shall succeed again."

And whilst he spoke, he acted.

His friends were delighted to see his resurrection.

"Come and be a lion, old fellow," some of them said to him.

But he shook his head.

"No," he said, brightly. "I have other fish to fry."

"But you may roar like a lion, and yet fry your fish in peace!"

"The two occupations cannot be carried on at the same time," he answered.

"Some people do it," was the reply, "and pretty successfully too."

"It depends on temperament," Brian said.

Nevertheless they persuaded him to undergo some lionising for the sake of the experience, and his remarks and criticisms amused them.

"Uppingham is a simple sort of fellow," they said, not disparagingly. "He was always like that, and he has not changed either."

For such a poor unflattering view do most people take of human nature, that it seems an amazing thing to them when a man rises to fame, and does not lower himself by losing his balance. But Brian was partially protected by temperament, by enforced absence from the scenes of active life, and now, by a passionate zeal to make up for lost time, put the best of his mind into his work, and then feel that he had the right to speak out his love to Nora, and offer to her the first-fruits of his renewed career and restored activity — renewed and restored by

and through her. Then he would be able to say to her:

"I have done this. I have done that. And you have made me do it. It is through your help that I have brought my task to an end, because it has been done for you. But for you, I could never have begun it. But beginning it for your sake, I have finished it for your sake — and mine. And now I may tell you my heart's desire."

So whilst Nurse Isabel laughed at what she called his slowness, he was really pressing on at a tremendous pace towards his goal, gathering strength and happiness and confidence all the time. No doubts crossed his mind as to the certainty of reaching that goal.

"Unless God send His hail or blinding fireballs, I shall arrive."

That was how he felt. So, immersed in work, saturated with his great idea, dominated by his new-born impulses, and armed against all doubts, he pressed on, and did not realise that an enemy was pressing on too and leaving him far behind. He knew, of course, that Theodore Bevan visited Nora; but in his simplicity of heart he had not thought seriously of that little oddity as a rival. He did not even dislike him as much as the others did; and also he had not the opportunities of observing the effect which he produced on Nora. For Nora was always more her normal self in Brian's company. Her father noticed this. It was just as though the one man were the antidote to the other. The interest which she took in his work, roused her from her increasing mental depression, and the mere fact that he depended on her sympathy for the accomplishment of his tasks, made her conquer her listlessness each time he came to see her. Also there was something healing

in his nature, and something infectious in his simple thanksgiving for renewed life and enthusiasm. She welcomed him always with a smile in her heart — and a sigh. He saw the smile, and did not hear the sigh. But Nurse Isabel's warning began to haunt him; and when he next paid a visit to Nora's home, his eyes were opened. He found her wretched and unreachable. Her face was grey, and there was no strength in her voice.

"You are ill," he said, looking at her gravely.

"Oh no," she answered.

"Then you are unhappy," he said.

"Is there such a thing as happiness?" she asked, evasively.

"You surely are not thinking of joining the Decadents," he said.

"I am not thinking of joining anything," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "On the contrary, I am feeling especially detached from everything."

Many words rose to his lips — words of love, kindness, sympathy, tenderness — but her manner was so forbidding that he dared not speak them. He felt in his pocket, and brought out several closely-written sheets.

"If you are feeling detached," he said, looking at them doubtfully, "you will not be inclined to listen to my outpourings to-day; and indeed I begin to fear that I have often been taxing you."

"Oh, don't say that," she said, hastily. "It is not true. I always take the greatest pleasure and pride in your work."

She put her hands up to her face, and covered it for a moment.

"I don't know what I should have done without it," she said.

He bent forward.

"You are in trouble," he said, gently. "Could you perhaps open your heart a little to me, so that I might try to help you?"

A wonderful softness came over her expression; a wonderful thrill passed through her whole being. It seemed to her at that moment eminently possible to open her heart to this man and tell him of the shadow on her soul and the bondage of her spirit. She felt impelled to do it: she was so absolutely unhappy; had lost her way; lost touch with herself and other people; lost the very key-note of harmony with her higher nature; lost her enthusiasms; her proper hold on what she most cared for in life; was losing her will power and her own individuality; was becoming, nay, had become, a thing to be played on, strummed on, jarred on, by a man whom she did not even love. And here was a friend, the pure-hearted, high-minded historian, wishing to help her. She hesitated for a moment, looked at his clear, faithful face — and let herself go.

"I believe I can speak to you," she said, excitedly. "Oh, I've tried dozens of times to speak to my old father, but he has rubbed me up the wrong way — everybody has been rubbing me up the wrong way — everybody has been cautioning me against Theodore Bevan — abusing him, exaggerating his peculiarities, pointing out dangers which do not exist, rallying me, criticising me, until I am absolutely sick of every one and everything."

"And are you sick of Theodore Bevan too?" Brian asked, quietly.

She looked at him so helplessly that his heart sprang out to greet her. But he held himself controlled.

"I am overshadowed," she said, like a tired child.

"That is the real truth of the matter. I never thought it possible. It has come unawares."

"Is it love?" he asked, with a tremble in his voice.

"Love surely brings happiness," she said, shaking her head. "I am not happy."

"Then if it is not love, it can be dealt with," he said, firmly. "Only Love and Death have to go their own way unimpeded. All our entreaties cannot keep off Death. All our resistings cannot deter Love. And there is no mistaking either Love or Death."

He spoke so quietly, and yet with such absolute conviction, that Nora glanced at him wonderingly, and felt again the thrill of being with him.

"I have not been giving any particular attention to your friend Mr Bevan," he continued, "because my thoughts and anxieties have been directed elsewhere. I have been pressing on towards my goal, and my goal has been you. I had not meant to speak to you until the time had come when I could say to you: 'I have picked up the threads of my life, I have found my way back to the scene of action, I have finished my book and launched it out in the world, and at last I feel that I may dare open my heart and show how you are enshrined in it.' But now I can only say: 'I am picking up the threads of my life, I am finding my way back to the scene of action, only I have not reached as far as I would fain have gone, before pleading for myself and asking for your love.' But you know. You have seen and felt how you have changed the world for me. You have lifted me up and urged me on; you have inspired and fired me; from the moment I saw you, I passed, as it were, into a promised land. To be so lonely as I was when you first came to me — and then suddenly to be flooded with hope and love — ah, I have not been thinking of Theodore Bevan

— I've been thinking of myself and you — you and myself, you and me together — you, the very keynote of my life, the very kernel of my heart."

He had unconsciously opened his arms wide, and his hands were trembling; and she had been leaning back against the sofa; but as he went on, she had strained forward and clasped her hands on her knees. Her face was deadly pale; there was an expression of vague and unexpected hope in her eyes, like that of a shipwrecked sailor who has suddenly sighted a passing vessel. Some words rose to her lips, but she could not give them utterance; and the next moment, she had covered her face with her hands and was sobbing bitterly; her whole strong frame was convulsed with sobs.

He stemmed the tide of his passion and emotion, and knelt beside her, even as a mother might kneel by her stricken child.

"My own sweet love," he said, with beautiful tenderness, "I had not meant to take you unawares — it was only that you were in such trouble, and it seemed so natural for me to speak of my great love. I seemed suddenly to have the right to do so, since you were in trouble. If you had said you had loved him, then I should have had no right to interfere with you and your grief. But you said it was not love, my own dearest Heart — and then the floodgates were opened for me — "

She raised her tear-stained face to him.

"You must not speak like that to me," she said between her sobs. "I am not worthy of such as you. I am just a selfish, self-centred girl, to whom everything has come too easily — pleasure and work and everything beautiful, and now your love. And I'm not worthy of it, and not free. If I were free in mind and spirit I

might have striven to be worthy. But I am not free — that man stands between me and you — between me and everything — it's Fate — and I'm not free. No, no, you must not speak like that to me — I cannot bear it — it is more than I can bear." . . .

"Hush, hush, you must not sob like that," he said, gently, but still she sobbed.

"You must free yourself if you are not desiring this bondage," he said. "You must not be beaten by that pale ghost, Fate."

But she went on sobbing and made no answer.

"I will help you to free yourself," he said. "I have the right to do so since I love you, and since you tell me that this man, whom I have been ignoring all this time, stands between you and me."

But she shook her head as though to imply that nothing and no one could help her.

"Nora," he said, tremblingly.

She looked up at the sound of her name.

"I can wait," he said, smiling sadly. "I am one of those who can wait; and when you want me, I am here for you, now or hereafter. If you want love or help, remember always I am waiting for you. I know I have been waiting for you all my life — for you and no one else; for when you came, you see I recognised you at once. When I have left you, you will think of my words, and they will help you in your struggle. You will say: '*Brian is waiting!*'"

"*Brian is waiting*," she repeated, with unconscious fervour.

"Yes," he said, "that is what you will say, and I thank God that you have begun to say it already. You tell me Theodore Bevan stands between you and me. But I stand between him and you. If I may not reach any

farther than that just now, my own sweet Love, at least you may remember that there I stand and hold my ground against all odds."

He stooped down, and gently raised her hand to his lips.

"Good-bye, dear," he said. "You are sending me away sad, but not hopeless. Some day this barrier between us shall be broken down." He turned to go.

"Brian," she cried, with a sudden awakening.

Her sobs had ceased, her tear-stained face was lit up with a passing radiance.

He turned to her with new-born hope.

"Is it possible after all that my time of waiting — "

The door opened, and Theodore Bevan stepped into the room.

"Good evening," he said to Nora. "I meant to have been here by four o'clock. It has just struck five."

CHAPTER IX

A KICK AND A BETROTHAL

BRIAN went home that evening feeling sad and helpless, for directly Theodore Bevan had made his appearance, Nora seemed to fall under his influence. He sat for a long time in his study puzzling out the situation, and made up his mind to open his heart to Mr Penhurst.

He turned to his writing after that, and worked late into the night, and then remembered that he had forgotten an engagement in Puppet Land, as he called the society world, to which he was sometimes invited.

"Never mind," he thought, with a smile, "some of the other puppets will turn up, and we are all one and the same to her ladyship; we have no separate existence, no distinctive characteristics in her eyes. I will go and be a puppet some other time; and I think, if I remember rightly, the successful Western 'cattle-puncher' was going to be the guest of the evening. That makes it all right."

The next morning he picked out from his letters a specially curious handwriting. The delicately-traced words on the envelope fascinated him, and it was some time before he opened it.

Then he read:

"SIR, — You will, I am sure, regret to learn that your interview with Miss Penhurst has greatly upset and distressed her. I feel compelled to ask you not to seek to see her for the present; and lest you be inclined to question my authority, I have the honour to tell you that Miss Penhurst is thinking of engaging

herself to me, and that I therefore would seem to have the right to protect her, so far as I can, from any unwelcome expression of devotion or friendship.

"THEODORE BEVAN."

The letter dropped from Brian's hand, and he sat as one paralysed. Then he pulled himself together, and snatching up his hat, went straight off to Theodore Bevan's lodgings in Bedford Square. There was an amused smile on Bevan's thin lips when he looked up and recognised his early visitor.

"Ah," he said, "I expected you. I have delayed my departure by half an hour."

Brian turned to the landlady who had shown him up, and was now going away:

"Stay," he said to her, "I won't keep you long." Then, without a moment's hesitation, and without giving any sign or suggestion of what he intended to do, he took Theodore Bevan by the collar and deliberately shook him. It was all done so quickly that there could be no resisting. Theodore Bevan was shaken backwards and forwards like some perverse impudent child, and then kicked across the room.

"Damned impudent little puppy," Brian said. "Here's your letter, and this is my answer to it. And there's your landlady to witness that I have laid hands on you. And that is all I have to say to you."

He threw the letter on the breakfast-table, glanced at the landlady, who wore an amazed but not an unsympathetic look, and leisurely left the house.

The landlady went off without daring to make any comment to Mr. Bevan on this strange little episode; but downstairs, in the kitchen, her pent-up feelings of wonderment found due expression, and she ended by saying:

"And it were all the world like a big dog shaking a rat."

Brian meanwhile hurried to Nora's home, and asked for her. The servant said she was out, but that Mr. Penhurst was in his study. Brian found the old man bending over a volume of Spinoza.

"Ah," he said, looking up, "you are an early visitor, but a welcome one."

"And it is not my first visit, either," said Brian, slipping into the arm-chair. "I have just come from Theodore Bevan's lodgings, where I gave him a good sound shaking for some impudence of his."

In a few words he related the whole history: his interview with Nora on the previous evening, her outburst of confidence, his own declaration of love, and the sudden appearance of Theodore Bevan.

"Directly he came, she seemed to shrink into herself," Brian said; "and there was no reaching her. The only thing for me to do was to go, and I came to look for you, but you were out."

"I am always out now," Roger Penhurst said, sadly. "Home is not the same to me that it was a few months ago. That man has changed everything for me. He comes so often, and his very presence is detestable to me. I never knew how much I could dislike any one until I met him. Apart from him, my nature can burst into flowers; but side by side with him, those flowers die down into hideous weeds. I am all wrong with myself, and filled with hatred and malice. I am very unhappy. I wander away alone, a forsaken old man — and my Nora does not see. Ah, she does not mean to be unkind. It is only that she cannot see. These times come to us all — to the best of us, too — when we cannot see clearly, and no one can help us to a better vision.

Then, when it is too late for ourselves and for those who have loved us, the scales fall from our eyes."

He turned impulsively to Brian and held out both his hands.

"I have always thought you loved my dear girl," he said; "and hearing this welcome news from you yourself fills me again with hope. Make your love so strong that you may succeed in freeing her from that little centipede's power, and win for yourself her heart and her father's blessing. I know her so well that I am sure you are a man after her own heart. Poor child! And I've been able to do nothing to help her: I've bungled, and she has been drifting away from me, and in a direction in which she would never have chosen to go of her own free will. But if she drifts to you, all will be well."

He rose from his chair, and seemed to expand with something of his old geniality.

"Ah," he said, "you've put fresh life into me. I feel I have a comrade again — some one to back me up against a common enemy." Then, with a return of cheerfulness, a twinkle came into his eye.

"And so you took and shook him!" he said, smiling. "Capital!"

As the whole scene dawned more clearly on him, he laughed.

"Delightful!" he said. "Only how I wish I had had enough gumption to do it myself. I have been too depressed lately to do anything sensible. I too have been drifting — anywhere. I have been dreadfully worried about my Nora: she is so unlike herself, so spiritless and morbid, so impatient in her manner, and dogged in her persistence about this wretched little rag of a man. But now you step forward, and suddenly I become flooded with hope. What I cannot do, being only her

old father — and a very bad specimen of a parent — you will be able to do, being her lover."

"I am, indeed, full of love for her," Brian said. "I felt from the moment I saw her that Nora was mine and mine only. And it never entered my head to take that man into consideration."

"And I felt from the moment I saw you that I desired you for my son," Roger Penhurst said, warmly.

"Dear, dear old man," Brian said. "You were good to me from the very beginning when you first measured my head!"

"You have a fine head," Roger said, smiling, and looking at Brian's strong and open forehead. "Not that I mean that it would be specially advantageous to choose a son-in-law according to the measurement of his head."

"You were good to me from the beginning," Brian continued, "and there seemed to be no obstacle; or rather I did not realise there was any. Nurse Isabel warned me all along about Theodore Bevan, but it was only yesterday that my eyes were opened; and I saw for myself, when he came into the room, what a subtle influence he has over her. And then this letter. He would not dare to write in that strain to me, unless he had some strong hope of becoming engaged to her."

"I know nothing of what happened last night," Roger said. "Six months ago Nora would have told me everything. She came down to breakfast this morning looking thoroughly miserable, and hurried off to her work. She will not be home until twelve."

"I shall wait here to see her," Brian said. "Last night I all but won her; and then suddenly I lost her. She passed away from me as a spirit might have passed. I cannot believe that she sanctioned that letter. I cannot believe that she would not wish to see me. It

must be his impudent invention or else his extraordinary influence against which she does not seem able to fight. But I can wait and hope; for I believe that she is destined to be mine."

So the two men waited together for Nora even as they were to wait afterwards for many long weeks and months. The lover unfolded his heart to the father, and the father eased his saddened heart to the lover, and the confidence and kindness between them grew apace. Brian was more hopeful than Roger Penhurst about Nora being able to free herself from Bevan's power. Her father had seen the whole thing from the beginning, and he knew better than Brian how greatly she had been changing those last nine months, ever since Bevan had found her at the gate-house of the old Castle.

"He has been pulling her mind to shreds, and toying with her soul," Roger said.

"But he does not love her?" Brian said.

"Love her?" Roger repeated. "Such a little worm as that has no heart with which to love. He is only a mental machine. I would rather that my girl ran away half-a-dozen times over with a real throbbing human being, than get her dear mind caught and held in the cruel wheels of a silent devilish piece of mechanism — so silent that most people don't believe in it unless it is given a name."

"But the unlabelled poisons are the most dangerous," said Brian.

"Ah, you are right," Roger answered. "And I knew by instinct when I saw that little Bevan, that he was an enemy to her, and to me, and to all who loved her."

"Could you not somehow have prevented the acquaintance from growing into an intimacy?" Brian asked.

Roger shook his head.

"Oh, in my own way I've tried," he said, "but it has been of no avail, and Nora and I have not been on those terms with each other, where the parent lays down the law, and the child has to give in and make the best or worst of it. If we had had a different sort of relationship with each other, many things would have been better for her — and some worse. But when all is said and done, we have been very happy together. And happiness is not a bad training in its way."

"Yes," continued the old man, "we were wonderfully happy together until he came into our lives: tasks in common, friends in common, foes in common — until now. She has put up with my dry-as-dust comrades, and I have swallowed her modern women and liked them. We have never really fallen out about anything or any one until this little centipede came on the scenes. She has forgiven me all my faults, and has always been very lenient to me, and full of broad understanding. My girl, my Nora ——"

Brian was deeply moved by the old man's sadness. He looked at Roger Penhurst's splendid face, noble forehead, and wealth of white and silvery curls, and felt a fresh wave of admiration and affection for him.

"Don't be so down-hearted," he said, kindly. "This shadow will pass. I know it will pass. And if your haven sometimes seems to fail you, let my home be your haven. Don't wander about a forsaken old man. Come to me, and we will talk of Nora and Herbert Spencer, and Imperial politics and Nora. We will talk of Spinoza and America, and brain-books and Nora. She will be woven into all our thoughts and words, even 'as the vine tastes of its own grape.' Look up. Let your bright spirit pierce the gloom. Whatever the

passing trouble, your daughter, at least, loves you with her whole heart. You cannot imagine to yourself in what loving terms she speaks of you, and of all the happiness she has had with you ever since she can remember. I have heard it from her own dear lips, and have seen her face light up when your name was even mentioned. But you know it."

"Yes, I know it," the old man said, with sudden brightness. "And you are right, Uppingham. I will chase away the sadness from my soul. I've managed very badly over this Bevan business. I have a horrid temper at times, and I know I have rubbed her up the wrong way; and that has made her stubborn like her father. When she comes back, I will begin all over again. With you to help me, as my comrade and her lover, I believe we may yet beat off the enemy. And you have begun already — by to-day's work. Ah, that was a capital piece of work — so quick and thorough!"

"It remains to be seen whether it was thorough," Brian answered, smiling. "It was at least quick!"

And rendered more cheerful by the recollection of the centipede's discomfiture, they talked of other things, and Roger showed Brian some of his treasures: some of Handel's manuscripts, some old Italian church music, two or three of his instruments, a splendid old *viol da gamba*, and his favorite violoncello, a Grancino, not specially valuable, but with a tone of exquisite purity and pathos.

"Nora helped me to buy that with her first earnings," he said, proudly. "I had set my heart on it, and several times she found me flirting with it in the old fiddle-shop, where I used to go and visit my old friend, the well-known violin-maker, now passed away. The end of the story is that one day she brought it home. I found

it here when I returned. I was very angry at first, and finally accepted it without a murmur. I will play to you the melody with which we christened it that evening — our favourite Boccherini. I played it before to you in the church; but it bears repeating."

He resined his bow, gently tuned the Grancino, and began. Brian looked towards him at first, but then bent forward near the fire, and saw visions in the changing lights of the flames. Boccherini's Andante is sad music. The sadness penetrated into the heart of both listener and player. The door was softly opened, and Nora came in.

"Father," she said, with more emotion than she had shown to him for many weeks, "my favourite melody — and you playing it so beautifully."

She looked across to the fireside and saw Brian. Brian rose. Her father leaned against the violoncello: she stood between them, her head bowed, her face drawn and pale. It was Brian who broke the silence.

"I have waited to see you," he said, and his voice trembled as he spoke.

"I wished not to see you just yet," she said.

"Then you sanctioned Mr Bevan's letter to me?" he said, anxiously.

"I wished not to see you just yet," she repeated. "It was more than I could bear."

Then she went on hurriedly:

"I think it is best for me to tell you both that I have decided to engage myself to Theodore Bevan. It has been a great struggle to me, and I suppose time only will show whether I have done rightly. But if I had decided otherwise, I should have been very unhappy and restless. Father, you have known all along how things were going. But to you, Mr Uppingham, I owe an ex-

planation; and I was intending to write to you. You were very good to me yesterday, and I shall never forget it. Mr Bevan and I had had some falling out, but when he came, many things were explained, and I learnt of his great love for me. He is not like other people; but, father, you can get to know and respect him if you choose, only you have always persistently disliked him, and without a cause too. And you, Mr Uppingham ——"

He interrupted her.

"I think you must not say anything about me just now," he said. "It would be more than I could bear."

He passed on to the door, and there he paused.

"Last night," he said, "I seemed suddenly to hope that my time of waiting would not be very long. The hope died at the moment of its birth. But hope, like spring-time, Nora, is born afresh. And I shall always be waiting for you — always."

Nora had stood with bowed head. Now she looked up, and saw that he had gone. She drew nearer to her father, who was leaning back in his chair, resting his hand on the scroll of the 'cello. He seemed as one paralysed, or else lost in thought.

"Father," she said, entreatingly, and she touched him on the arm. Six months ago she would have passed her hands through his silvery curls and caressed them. Now it was all different. He roused himself, glanced at her impatiently, seemed as though he wanted to give vent to his feelings by flinging his instrument, his bow, his music, anywhere, everywhere. But his mood changed. He put the belovèd Grancino tenderly on its side, and unscrewed his bow.

"You are a bitter disappointment to me, Nora," he said at last. "You are not a child, and you ought to know your own mind, as far as any one ever does know

his own mind. In my own way, I have wrestled with you over this Theodore Bevan. If I had known how to behave more like an ordinary sensible British parent, perhaps things would have been better for you and me. I blame myself for long years of laziness and incompetence about your bringing up; and I blame you for your ingratitude and your utter disregard of all my wishes."

"But, father," she began.

"Don't begin to argue and explain," he said. "I'm sick of that. I have scarcely ever asked anything of you; and now, the first time I ask, you refuse. But I again beg you to pull yourself together and give up that detestable little man."

"I cannot give him up," Nora answered, firmly. "It is fate."

There was silence between them for a moment, and then:

"You mean that?" he asked.

"Absolutely," she answered. "It is fate. I am impelled to it."

"I shall never again ask anything of you, Nora," the old man said. "And now things must just take their own way."

"Ah, father, don't turn from me like that," she cried. "I have not done anything to disgrace you — you don't think that I have done anything to disgrace you — surely, surely?"

"No, I don't think that," he said, coldly. Then with a sudden impulse, he laid his hand on her head. There it rested in kindness and blessing and pity, and many other beautiful things. But he did not speak another word, and soon afterwards he went out of the house.

Thus began Nora's engagement to Theodore Bevan.

CHAPTER X

MRS MARY SHAW AS COMFORTER

It was only a few days after Nora's engagement to Theodore Bevan, that Brian, walking past the British Museum, met Nurse Isabel.

In spite of her engaging outdoor apparel, she looked rather doleful, and Brian rallied her at once.

"Another depressing and distinguished patient?" he asked.

"No," she answered, brightening up when she saw him. "Pretty good luck on the whole. I have only had one novelist lately, and one poet, and one consulting physician. The rest have been passable."

"Then why are you looking so miserable?" he said.

"I don't think you look much better yourself," she said.

"I am not very happy," he answered.

"I know all about it," Nurse Isabel said. "I went to call on Miss Penhurst yesterday, and I learnt from her that she was engaged to Mr. Bevan, and that, at his express wish, I was not to be included amongst her acquaintances. That is his revenge on me for my impertinence in delivering an unpleasant message — that and sundry other little stabs in the dark. He has been injuring me in more than one direction with covert aspersions on my work and my character. I don't mind that so much, but I do mind being warded off from Miss Penhurst as though I were a leper."

"Let us come and have a talk in the vestibule," he said. "Can you spare the time?"

"Yes, but I can't afford to be depressed any more," she said. "And on the rare occasions when I *have* honoured the Museum, I have felt inclined to cut my throat. Museums and geography books and atlases don't agree with me. Let us go to the Hungarian restaurant."

So they went, and he told her of his great disappointment.

"You were too slow," she said, sipping her coffee. "I warned you. I never heard of anything so ridiculous as a man deliberately sitting down to write a continuation of a History when he ought to be proposing to the woman he loves. I am not at all sorry for you."

But she looked sorry, and her manner was very sympathetic to him. She often thought of him, and always as a chastening influence on her wayward nature. He had not the least suspicion that since she had learnt to know him she was not quite the same woman as before. What would he have said, had he known, that many a time and oft, Nurse Isabel's needlework fell from her hands at dusk, and she sat and thought of him, and recalled all his fun and criticism, and envied the woman who had won his heart — and wondered how she would be feeling if she were that woman. Ah! she knew how she would be feeling — so grateful, so good, so glad to have found a strong haven of strong love. And Nora, with all that within her reach, had turned away. But that was the irony of life. And she herself. . . . Ah, well, it was of no use to dwell on that. These thoughts came over her now as she sat opposite to him, and for a moment she was lost in reverie. Then she found herself again.

"And now, I suppose," she said, "having had this

disappointment, you are going to return to your old state of misery and depression."

"No," he said. "I am going straight on with my work and my life. My love for her brought me back to life again, and I shall not lose hold either of her love nor my life."

"Even although she is going to belong to some one else?" Nurse Isabel said, just a little wistfully.

"I can wait for her," Brian answered.

"You may have to wait all your life," she said, playing with her gloves.

"Then I must wait all my life," he replied. "Such things happen to men sometimes."

"Well, at least you punished him for his impudence in interfering with you," she said, brightening up. "Would that I had been there to see!"

"Perhaps it was not impudence after all," he said, "if she had really expressed the wish not to see me."

"But he made her express the wish," Nurse Isabel answered. "You know that. Just as I know that it was he who bade her discontinue my acquaintanceship."

"Some day," Brian said, "she will see clearly again."

"You have learnt to hope better than in the old days, when no persuasions could make you take a cheerful view of life and work," she said, returning to her usual rallying manner. "Oh, my goodness, what a trial you were! And how about the book?"

Then as they walked up Oxford Street, he told her what he had been doing, and how he intended shortly to go away to Holland, having been commissioned by a publisher to write a book on that country. He was also hoping to go down in two or three days' time to the King's Head, to seek comfort and renewed courage amidst the scenes where he had first met Nora.

"And you?" he said, as they parted.

"Oh, I shall be engaged in my usual occupations of charity and loving-kindness," she answered. "Next week I am going to nurse a bishop. Now I come to think of it, I dare say that is what makes me feel so terribly out of spirits. Well, good-bye, and don't forget to keep your best foreign stamps for me. And let me know if you have any news of Miss Penhurst and that little Bevan; and if I can serve you or her in any way, I will leave all the bishops and poets and philosophers to get well or worse without me. And, as you know, I am not afraid of little Bevan. I don't even care that he has been circulating evil reports against my character. But I care tremendously that he has told her, poisoned her mind against me, and cut me off from her friendship. I care about that far more than about the untruths which he is launching out against me. For they are untruths. I may be a ridiculous, frivolous sort of woman, but it has never been anything more than that with me. You believe that?"

"Of course I believe it," Brian said.

She nodded her head as though satisfied, and added:

"And sometimes I don't think I am nearly as vain and ridiculous as some of my bishops and literary people. Well, my first attempt to win a woman's friendship has not been very encouraging. But I liked her ever so much. And the greatest proof of my attachment to her was . . ."

But Nurse Isabel changed her mind, said no more, and sped on her way; but as she went along she said aloud to herself:

"And the greatest proof of it was that when he recovered his strength, awoke from his long depression, and fell in love with her instead of me, I was not even angry

or jealous. By all the laws of nature, I ought to have hated her at once, but instead of that, I went on liking her, even though I was learning to love him. Ah, well, he won't know. He is so very slow about these things."

Brian parted from her without a suspicion of her real feeling for him. But he intended to find out what these reports were, and to stop them at once. She might say she did not care, but he knew that she was sensitive about her good name, perhaps because, for her old mother's sake, she had made such mighty efforts, against her own inclinations and in the midst of many temptations, to keep it still written down on the right hand leaf of the book of morality. But he could not help her about Nora. He could not help himself. A great longing seized him to hasten his departure to the King's Head. He went home, put his things together, and in a short time found himself in the train on his way to the land of comfort. He felt that it would comfort him and ease his heart to be in the village where she had spent so many months, and where the people knew and loved her so well. For the paths trodden by those whom we love become holy ground to us for ever and ever. It was early summer, towards the end of June, but there was a perfect deluge of rain when Brian got out at the little wayside station nine miles away from Graystoke. He had brought his bicycle with him, and was just leaning against it, contemplating a gloomy and moist ride, when a carrier's cart drove up, and David the blacksmith's cheery voice was heard saying:

"Any parcels for Mrs Mary Shaw?"

Then he looked towards Brian, and recognised him.

"Why, it's Mr Uppingham, as I'm a live man!"

In a few moments Brian and his bicycle were com-

fortably installed in David's borrowed cart, rattling along the wet roads towards the King's Head.

"Mrs Mary will be that pleased," David said. "She won't mind her groceries not having come. As a rule, it do put her out awful when the grocery stores don't turn up. But I reckon, Mr Uppingham, she'd think you quite as good as twelve boxes of candles."

When they drew up before the King's Head, about seven in the evening, Mrs Mary Shaw hastened out to the carrier's cart. The carrier was ill, and had appointed David to be his "locum tenens."

"Now, Davy, look sharp and hand me down my groceries," Mrs Mary said. "I be that hustled to-night. Great-uncle be took ill, and says he be going to die."

"Great-uncle has said that this last fifteen year, Mrs Shaw," remarked Davy. "And as for the groceries, they've never come. But there be something else for you. Oh no, it aren't Parrington! I don't give Parrington no lifts — I'm that jealous of Parrington — always was, you know, only you wouldn't see it!"

"Get along, Davy," said Mrs Mary Shaw, laughing, for Davy always kept up the *rôle* of being an unaccepted sweetheart, although he had never even thought of making love to the hostess of the King's Head.

At that moment Brian, who had kept in the back of the cart, leaned forward, and prepared to announce himself.

"Why, I do declare it be Mr Uppingham, of all people!" Mrs Shaw exclaimed; and, forgetting all about the much-desired groceries and great-uncle's dangerous illness, the genial landlady hurried him into the inn, and whipped him up to the glowing fire, where great-uncle and Great-great-aunt Rebeccah Renaldson were basking in the warmth. They did not like to sit together, but

they were both ailing, and both obliged to seek the comfort of the hearth.

"Here be Mr Uppingham," said Mrs Shaw. "He be cold and damp, and he'll bide here until I've made the fire in the parly."

"Ah," said great-uncle, whom no unexpected circumstance ever surprised, "so you be come back, sir, just to see me a-dying. I be a dying man to-night. I've the toothache something terrible."

"Toothache!" replied Aunt Rebeccah Renaldson, scornfully, "and not a tooth in his mouth at his age. He be not a dying man. 'Tis I who be a-dying, Mr Uppingham, and no one to lift a finger for me: Mrs Mary Shaw never do think of no one but herself and Parrington; and what Parrington do see to like in her is more than I can foller, for she be aging wonderful quick."

Brian settled down amongst them, and showed due sympathy with their fancied woes. Wullie soon appeared, and from all that could be gathered on the subject, he was evidently not yet following in the footsteps of his scamp of a father.

"Ah," said Mrs Shaw, as she laid the cloth in the parlour, "Wullie is a remarkable good lad still; though there's no knowing how soon he'll be breaking out. Parrington says 'stuff and nonsense,' but I shakes my head, Mr Uppingham, and knows different. Don't I, Wullie?"

Wullie, who was bringing in a liberal supply of wood, grinned, as he always did when he heard these doleful prophecies of his own unavoidable damnation, and putting his hands up to his cheeks to make a sort of trumpet, said in a loud whisper to Brian:

"I say, mother is a-going to marry Mr Parrington

next month, and that's why Aunt Rebeccah and great-uncle be in such a stew. And grandfather won't have nothing to do with it, and everybody be as cross as ninepins 'cept mother and ——"

Wullie was clapped out of the room, and Mrs Mary Shaw, smiling and blushing, answered Brian's inquiry as to whether the news were really true.

"Well, yes, sir," she said, as she sank down into the easy-chair. "The fact is, I be real sick of hearing Parrington propose. And then, 'twas only lately I heard for certain that Wullie's father was dead, and I didn't tell Parrington. But he learnt it hisself. Parrington be awfully quick. And he made me promise for next month. And I wrote Miss Nora about it, and there's never a line come from her. I've been a-fearing she is ill."

Then Brian told her that Nora was engaged to Theodore Bevan, and that her time had been taken up for many months, and that she was not as bright and gay as she used to be in Graystoke.

"Going to marry that little horror!" exclaimed Mrs Shaw. "I never could abide him. It can't be true; my Miss Nora a-going to marry the likes of him! I can't believe it of her, and she so mighty particular, and her head so high in the air, bless her, and quite right, too: she can't know what she's a-doing. He's bewitched her — the little viper gentleman, coming sneaking along here where nobody wanted him: my Miss Nora going to marry the likes of him!"

Mrs Shaw's apron was at that moment precipitated over her head, and when it fell back to its wonted place, two large tears were seen rolling down her cheeks. She took her handkerchief, rubbed it into her eyes and over her face, and then she looked up. Brian was sitting

back in his chair, with a far-away look, a strained expression on his face.

The woman's instinct in Mrs Mary Shaw revealed the whole truth to her.

"Why, I believe you've been a-sweethearting after her yourself," she said, tenderly. "Poor dear soul — poor dear soul! I remember how you spoke of her when you stayed here, and how I was always a-telling you all I knew of our dear Miss Nora — and I only too glad to tell, being that fond of her."

"And I only too glad to listen," he said, smiling sadly. "And I've come to listen again. That is why I've come. And to be where she has been, and amongst the people whom she has loved, and amongst whom I found her first. I felt that would comfort me."

"And so it will," said Mrs Shaw, soothingly. "And don't ye take on so. Miss Nora will come to her senses soon, and then you can go a-sweethearting after she. Lor! now, you mustn't be disheartened. Think of my poor Parrington — what a life I've been a-leading him these last three year and more, never knowing my own mind. And as like as not, when next month comes, I'll say, 'No, Parrington, I don't care for ye over much.' And yet I do care. But women-folk is like that, that's what they be like, and a good thing too, as men folk be mighty troublesome in their way. Don't ye take on so, Mr Uppingham. It'll all come right; and while you be here, we'll talk of Miss Nora and cheer you up. I'm a wonderful hand at cheering folk up: you should see me with Great-great-aunt Rebeccah Renaldson sometimes, though I won't deny that it be a terrible task, and I be always a-gasping for breath afterward — she do take it out of me. . . . Now, now, Mr Uppingham, you mustn't lose heart . . ."

The motherly manner, the quaint but very genuine efforts to comfort, touched Brian inexpressibly. He was touched to the very roots of his sore heart: all his disappointment and anxiety welled up in him. He buried his face in his hands and sobbed, and Mrs Mary Shaw, using her own natural tact — that beautiful and almost divine gift of womanhood — stole quietly out of the room.

The next morning was bright with sunshine, and Brian strolled in the direction of the Castle, along the road where he had taken his first drive with Nora. Yes, he remembered that old quaint thatched cottage yonder, and the crumbling old bridge to the left, and the trout stream, and those five enormous hay-ricks stationed like sentinels on the slope of the hill. They had only just been put up when he saw them last, and now they were darker in hue, having valiantly borne the changes and chances of a long winter. Yes, and he remembered that splendid old oak-tree near the mill. Nora had said it reminded her always of her father, with its spreading branches and comprehensive character. He paused and listened to the sweet singing of the birds. Nora knew their call-notes well. He passed on to the gate-house, where she had lodged, and waited outside, full of thoughts of her. Then he rang, and when the custodian appeared, annoyed as always at being disturbed, he won her over by speaking of Miss Penhurst, and was taken to the sitting-room, where the deputy-custodian had spent so many happy hours. Her photograph was there; and two or three of her books were scattered about.

The custodian left him there to rest, for it was washing-day, and she was busy and hoped that he would be able to show himself over the Castle. So

he rested, this poor Brian, and then he strolled over the Castle and lingered a long time in the monk's room, which he remembered had been her favourite retreat. He looked at the great expanse of country, which had always delighted her eyes and her sense of space, and at the river glistening with the early summer sunlight. As he wended his way back to the King's Head, he stopped at the beautiful old church, and glanced once more at the fine carved stalls, and the rare old leaden font, which she herself had shown him with so much pride; for she loved the church and everything in it. He examined the monumental brasses, and the figures of the Crusaders in the old chapel. He heard her dear voice telling him everything.

"I'm as good as a guide-book about these parts," she had said to him. "You see I've been here so often that the place is part of me, and I am part of it. Even Mr Kent, the verger, admits that I belong here by rights, for he told me the other day that I would make a wonderful nice brass or recumbent stone figure, and that is the highest praise from him, for he only concerns himself about dead things."

He remembered her saying that, and he remembered noticing that Mr Kent's sepulchral visage relaxed into something like a human smile when he came into the church and found her there. Yes, they all loved her there, in their own kindly way. Even Great-great-aunt Rebeccah Renaldson had nothing against her, and great-uncle always said she was a wonderful nice young person, and very handy at buying shag. And Mrs Shaw's quiet old father, Reuben, said she was an intelligent young woman, and mighty clever at knowing a turnip from a carrot, which was surprising in a party as lived in one of them towns; and David swore by his smithy's forge

that no one except himself should ever fetch her from the station. It was all very pleasant to hear, and Brian seemed to be learning more of her, and getting nearer to her own real self by means of these simple-hearted villagers. He felt soothed and comforted, and wrote at his book, smoked with great-uncle, prepared herbs with Reuben, talked politics with David, commerce with the travellers who baited at the King's Head, played nine-pins with Wullie, carried messages between Parrington and Mrs Shaw, and acted as general errand-boy and postman to the whole neighbourhood. Whenever he was looking sad, Mrs Shaw would say:

"Come, come, Mr Uppingham, don't you be a-taking on! It will all come right. Think of my poor Parrington!"

And very often she would come into the parlour, and he would put his pen aside, and she would sink down into the easy-chair, and talk of Nora.

"Oh, deary me," she said one day, "and the fun Miss Nora and me have had over poor Parrington! Many long lectures she's given me to behave myself kinder, and I've promised; and then when Parrington has come, I've been real nasty! And Miss Nora have pretended to be angry, and then have laughed hearty."

"I think I shall begin to say 'Poor Parrington,'" remarked Brian, laughing too.

"Oh, he don't take on, really," answered Mrs Shaw. "And if he do, it won't hurt the likes of him, bless him! Parrington isn't one to fret greatly. Ah, there, I hear his voice. Tiresome man, coming where he's not wanted!"

"And where be Mrs Mary Shaw, I wonder?" Parrington's voice was heard saying. "A nice sort of landlady for the Punchbowl."

"The Punchbowl indeed!" remarked Mrs Shaw, scornfully. "As if Mrs Mary Shaw would ever have anything to do with that horrid place."

"Here be three teetotallers asking for port wine," continued Parrington, in a loud voice, "and two carters for a mug of ale, and no one to serve 'em. What a badly managed establishment! I don't think anything of this King's Head: 'tis a mighty poor shanty."

"Shanty!" exclaimed Mrs Mary Shaw, pretending to be angry, but wreathed in smiles. "Did you hear that, Mr Uppingham?—shanty, indeed! Oh, I'll pay Parrington out."

Then she darted out of the "parly" to pay Parrington out, and Brian was left to his work and his own thoughts. But later on, he emerged and went into the kitchen, which also served as the bar of the inn, though there was a sort of division effected by the kitchen-table. Parrington was smoking a pipe on the domestic side of the barrier. Brian joined him, and said out of pure mischief:

"And so I hear, Mr Parrington, that you and Mrs Mary are to be married in a month's time?"

"Well, now," said Mrs Mary, pausing as she took the bread out of the oven, "that's the first I've heard of it, as I'm a live woman."

Parrington made no answer to this, but winked at Brian, and pointed to the old beams.

"This old place be a-crumbling to pieces, Mr Uppingham," he said. "It be not safe for nobody. I declare I'm always mighty glad to get away from this old shanty back to the Punchbowl!"

Part III

CHAPTER I

THE MICROMETER

So the time wore on. Summer had passed into winter, and it was more than eighteen months now since Theodore Bevan had come as a disturbing element into the lives of Nora and Roger Penhurst. After Nora had declared her decision to be engaged to Theodore Bevan, and refused to be won over by any entreaty, her father interviewed him, and told him that the engagement was against all his wishes and judgment, and that nothing would ever reconcile him to it.

"I understand that it does not meet with your approval," Bevan said, quietly. "I am of course very sorry. It would have been more agreeable for both of us if you could have liked me a little — or disliked me less."

"You will never make my girl happy," Roger said. "I am sure of that."

"You certainly court the unhappiness by taking up this tone with me," Bevan answered.

"Perhaps you are right," Roger Penhurst answered, brusquely, and he said no more about it. It was, in fact, useless. Moreover, it was so obvious that Theodore Bevan was indifferent to the old man's approval or disapproval. He was quite frank about his monetary

position : explained the resources of his private income, and mentioned that he occasionally added to it by special journalistic work. He seemed to have no relatives nor friends ; and therefore Nora had not to go through any formalities of introduction.

" I belong to no one," he said to her, almost pathetically ; " I am alone in the world."

The condition of things at the Penhursts' home did not change after the engagement, and Roger Penhurst went his own way, sometimes spending long days in the country and coming back tired out. When at home, he was more deeply engaged in reading and study. He began to learn Persian, and some learnèd friends from the British Museum came three times a-week to give him lessons. That was some comfort to him, for he was never so happy as when adding to his knowledge. But he looked sad and nipped, and he neglected his music. He missed her sympathy with it. She had taken a dislike to music, influenced of course by Theodore Bevan, who openly declared his scorn of the loveliest of all languages. Nora had no idea how her indifference wounded her old father. But Brian knew, for Roger had got into the way of talking to him freely about everything ; and the historian's comfortable lodgings in Mecklenburg Square had become the old man's haven, where he felt he was always welcome. It was touching to see the two friends together — each one sad at heart, and united by a common anxiety and affection. They very rarely spoke of Theodore Bevan, but Roger said once or twice that Nora's infatuation was as strong as ever, and that she seemed to have given up all her old friends, inclinations, and interests. Mr Bevan disliked the idea of her teaching, and so she had resigned two or three of her posts. He also disliked her going to the

Woman's Club, and so she had not resumed her subscription. Brian asked sometimes:

"And is she happy? Does she look happy? Is she bright?"

"Ah, that is just it," the old man would answer, sadly — "Is she happy? I can only tell you that when he does not come, she is miserable. And she has on her dear face 'the settled shadow of an inward strife.'"

"Does he seem fond of her?" Brian would ask.

"Could a man like that be fond of any one?" Roger invariably answered.

Yet, in a way, Theodore Bevan was fond of her, and Roger did not altogether do him justice. He was proud at having subdued her individuality; and for the first time in his life, he felt the beginnings of something like affection. He knew of course that she did not love him, and that it was only his strong influence over her which brought about her consent to the engagement. But he was not uneasy about that: the main point was that he was training her, moulding her, and making himself necessary to her. Sometimes he kept away on purpose: for he knew that she would fret and be restless, like some dumb animal which pines for its master, even though he be a cruel one. It was all very engrossing to him; and although he had amused and interested himself many a time before on the same lines, there had never been even a dash of sentiment in his previous experiments. He appreciated this new sensation, and commented on it in his journal.

He wrote:

"It is very odd how pleased I feel when any sad remark of mine concerning my lonely life or my small stature touches up my Athene's tenderness. Of course I have never been lonely. And as for my small stature,

— I would not change with any one — but Athene's sympathy with my fancied woes is extremely agreeable to me. I enjoy it."

And again in another place:

"Occasionally I stay away from my Athene in order that I may have the satisfaction of being missed."

And elsewhere:

"I should not have precipitated myself into this engagement with my Athene, if I had not feared that Uppingham's influence over her was increasing unduly. As it was, I only arrived just in time to prevent the climax of an engagement between them. Strangely enough, I had not intended to go to her home that evening; but a sudden access of jealousy prompted me to change my plans; and by an adroitness which, I confess, astonishes me now, I wrested the situation to myself. I worked, as always, on her sympathies, harping, of course, on my many disabilities and shortcomings, which have ever ostracised me from the realms of Being Understood and Being Loved. I do not regret my prompt action. Sometimes I think that the most desirable part of my life would be taken away if I lost Athene."

And elsewhere:

"Uppingham's insult to me has so far passed unnoticed. There was nothing for me to do except to remain quiet, until I had thought out some plan of revenge. Meantime, he is sufficiently punished by my appropriation of his Nora — and just as he had almost secured her; and Athene is grateful to me for ignoring the episode. My self-control in this matter makes her think well of me. It is a great satisfaction when some one, to whom you are not absolutely indifferent, thinks well of you: whether you deserve it or not.

So Uppingham may rest in peace awhile, and I have already been dealing with Nurse Isabel and little Madge Carson."

And indeed Nora was greatly impressed by the sweet patience with which he had borne Brian Uppingham's insult. She did not know in what terms Theodore Bevan had couched his letter to Uppingham, and he did not enlighten her. It was a delicate matter; for she knew in her heart of hearts that she had wronged Brian, and her own feeling of uneasiness about him made her grateful for Bevan's forbearance.

"It is for your sake," Bevan told her, quietly. And he added, as though fearing that she might perhaps be too hard on the historian, "You must forgive him, remembering that he has had a sore trial in losing you."

"You are very generous," Nora said, with sincere admiration. "You bear no malice. I have noticed that in your behaviour towards my father. He has often been very rude to you, and you never seem to notice."

"I have only been learning the lesson since I knew you," he said. "Sometimes, I own, it has been a hard one."

And he went away gratified with her praise, although he knew that it was he who countless times had been rude to her father — ignoring him, and deliberately pushing him out of his home and happiness; alienating his daughter from him, and in such a way that she never guessed. He smiled when he thought of the malice which he always bore towards people who were in his way, and yet, recognising all this, he was delighted by her belief in his generosity of mind and action.

Perhaps he persuaded himself that he was really what

she considered him to be. It is so easy even for the best of us to persuade ourselves that we are better than we are. But whilst he was thus enjoying Nora's good opinion of him, he was silently working against Nurse Isabel and Madge Carson, who had had the courage to warn his Athene against him. And the two opposite processes going on at the same time, did not interfere with each other. He was evidently in a state of great satisfaction. One special entry in his journal points to this: —

"I never remember feeling so well satisfied with myself. When I think of Athene now, and compare her with that masterful and scornful young woman who was acting as Deputy-Custodian at the Castle, I am lost in wonderment over the mesmeric, psychic influence which some human beings have over others: an influence inborn and never acquired. But Athene gives trouble, in spite of my strong hold over her. She has curious relapses to her old interests, her old friends, her old intimacy with her father. It keeps me very much interested; more so, of course, than if she had merely been a woolly lamb. Still, I find I have to be careful how I criticise her former life and the contents thereof. The other day an unwisely-worded disparagement about that wretched old Danish professor, who is always discovering new geniuses, evoked undoubted signs of rebellion. All this, however, gives a real zest to my undertaking, and I am almost inclined to believe I am experiencing what we call happiness — whatever that may mean."

He was right in saying that he had to be careful how he criticised Nora's former life, and every one and everything that belonged to it. He was much too wary to make many mistakes; and his micrometer, that evil

little instrument of disparagement, probed into and measured every fault and failing, every characteristic and detail, but so delicately that the mechanism was not detected. So Nora never knew how it happened that most people became uninteresting to her, or full of faults, or ridiculous, or objects of contempt and indifference. Perhaps it was an indulgent sort of contempt which took the greatest possession of her. No one escaped; and when she received a letter from Mrs Mary Shaw announcing in mysterious spelling and grammar her definite engagement to Mr William Parrington of the Punchbowl, she tossed the note on one side, and wondered how she could ever have taken an interest in those ignorant country people at Graystoke. The micrometer had thus been applied to those simple, honest villagers, whom she had known for years. It was never applied directly to Nora's dear old father, but to Old Age instead. And the fine, spreading old oak, with its magnificent branches and defiantly robust roots, became an impertinent lingerer on the face of the earth, demanding too much space, too much consideration — taking in every advantage and giving out none.

It was perhaps the cleverest thing Bevan did, the way in which he alienated Nora from her father without ever saying one word against him. And Roger himself helped his enemy by his own impetuosity and want of judgment; for although he made numberless resolutions pick up the old threads of friendship with Nora, and accept Theodore Bevan as an inevitable fact in his life, he always failed in all his efforts. He could not conquer his intense dislike for the man, nor his bitter disappointment in Nora. His existence would have been intolerable during this period, but for his friendship with Brian, and their constant intercourse together, broken into only

by Brian's visit to Holland and afterwards to Norway. During the historian's absence Roger plunged still deeper into Persian, but the joy of life had gone from him, and, with it, some of that wonderful vitality which is able to keep old age at bay. He did not attempt any summer-outing, but he often found his way into the Abbey, and there he would linger, sometimes in the cloisters, and sometimes in the Poets' Corner. He very rarely spoke of Brian to Nora; and she had no idea how much of his time was spent with the man who loved her and was waiting for her. She tried to put Brian out of her remembrance, but once she asked her father timidly about him.

"Is he well — and is he working — is he satisfied with what he has done — do you see him sometimes?"

And her father answered:

"Yes, I see him. He is well, but sad. And he is very busy. Brave men do not give up their life's work because women break their hearts."

After that, Nora did not dare make any further inquiries, and was thrown back on herself; and many of her timid renewals of intimacy were cut short in this way. But the estrangement between the two was inevitable, and nothing could have helped the situation. They probably knew this; and as time went on, and the micrometer became more perfect in its mechanism, Nora ceased to care, or thought she did. But there were no more scenes between them; for at least indifference has this advantage, that it often produces tranquillity. But one afternoon towards the end of January, Roger Penhurst came home in a state of unusual agitation, and found Nora alone in the sitting-room. She was working at some coloured embroidery, and in a lifeless, listless manner, which always irritated him.

"That little devil of yours has been trying to take away Nurse Isabel's character," he said.

"Nurse Isabel had no character to take away," Nora said, with provoking quietness. "Mr Bevan warned me against her some time ago, and as I do not care to have people of that description for my acquaintances, I asked her, as you know, to discontinue her visits."

"You mean that Bevan coerced you into snubbing her," Roger said.

"As you please, father," Nora said, flinching slightly. "You know I never quarrel with you now about Mr Bevan."

"It is a lifelong quarrel, Nora," he said. "And for my own part, the sooner you get married, the better."

"We fixed the date for about four months from to-day," Nora said, putting down her work, and looking up at her father.

"And I wish it were to-morrow!" he exclaimed, in his impetuous way. Then, with the penitence so characteristic of him, he said:

"No, no, I don't mean that, my girl. I would rather wait year after year, going along even in this miserable fashion, than hasten on, by one moment, your marriage with Theodore Bevan. For I am always, always hoping that the awakening may come."

Nora made no answer, but went on impassively with her needlework.

"The awakening will come of its own accord and in its own time," Roger said, gently.

"And you have been doing your best to hinder it," she said. "Your unreasonable dislike of Mr Bevan first opened my eyes to his real worth; and now you attempt to poison my mind against him by accusing him of defaming Nurse Isabel's character. He has

merely warned me of her, and I am much obliged to him."

"He has done far more than that," Roger said, becoming excited again. "He has circulated evil reports of her which have reached the notice of some of her best doctors. But she has a warm friend in me, and I shall do all I can for her. And she has another friend too, Brian Uppingham, who will not rest until everything is set right again — as far as such mischief-making can ever be set right."

"Mr Uppingham may well defend Nurse Isabel," Nora said, slowly. "It is a relief to hear that a man will speak up for a woman, when he has been one of the many to help to drag her down. Oh, I know about Brian Uppingham and Nurse Isabel."

Roger Penhurst glanced in astonishment at his daughter.

"My poor Nora," he said, "if that is how you see things now, may God help your distorted vision."

In this way the micrometer had been deftly applied to Brian Uppingham also.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST STEP

One day Theodore Bevan told Nora that his friends, Mr and Mrs Cummings, had returned from Australia, and that he should like to call on them with her. He professed to have a great admiration for Mr Cummings; called him a prince amongst men, a born statesman, the only possible saviour of England. Nora herself was anxious to see the sole human being who could inspire such enthusiasm in the heart of her little lover. He commented, too, on the delightful friendship existing between husband and wife. When Nora went to their home at Kensington, she found a timid, half-toned woman, who seemed to have no soul, no will of her own. Her speech was painfully hesitating, as though she were apologising for every word she said — and she did not dare say much. As she made her few feeble remarks, she turned in a half-frightened manner to her husband. When he and Bevan went out of the drawing-room to the library, Mrs Cummings became a little easier, gathered herself together, and talked about a few commonplaces. But the light soon faded from her eyes; and when her husband returned, the little feeble gleam of individuality had faded into nothingness. It was a painful exhibition. Cummings himself was a strong tall man, deliberately aggressive, with a strong brain, and not hampered by even the remnant of a heart. Bevan treated him with the greatest respect; and it was easy to see that Cummings appreciated the homage of his friend. The hero was affably condescending to

Nora, and took some pains to talk down to her. His condescension aroused some of her old spirit, and she began to argue with him. It was something about technical education. Then she looked up, became conscious of Theodore Bevan, and suddenly laid down all her weapons. When she went away she thought to herself:

"I shall become like that woman, Mrs Cummings. Is it possible that I am half-way there already?"

And that was the first step towards the awakening, the only first step possible, because made by herself. She did not know at the time that she had taken it. We probably do not know; but when we look back at the path, we say: "Ah yes, it was there — it was there that we took the first step, and by ourselves, unaided." That is where the value of it comes in to us: it was on our own initiative. Yet if we looked back still further and were honest, we should discover the almost invisible wires of communication and impulse which were the direct causes of that first step.

Theodore Bevan realised that he had committed an error of judgment in taking his Athene to the Cummings'. He wrote in his journal: —

"The visit to the Cummings' was a mistake. My Athene seems to have been chiefly impressed with Mrs Cummings' misery and mental servitude. She has referred to her several times, and to him too.

"'What a man,' she has said, 'and what a marriage! And that is your ideal of a prince amongst men! And that is your ideal of the married state? What a picture it gives to me of your real self!'

"It was foolish of me to take her there. My Athene was not ready for it. I have striven in every way to wipe out the remembrance. I have overdone my strength a little, and thus enlisted her sympathy and

kindness; I have been affectionate and dictatorial by turns; sad, bitter, and repentant, and finally I have won her back. But it is very astonishing to me how much I really suffer when she does turn upon me. I pretend to believe that I am only annoyed at being thwarted. But the fact remains that I am wounded." . . .

Soon after this, Nora woke up one morning with an insatiable thirst for a draught of her old life. She had neglected all her friends, given up all her interests; and people and things had been passing out of her life as they of necessity must, when there is no encouragement for them to remain. Where should she go to-day? what should she do? She thought she would like to go down to the British Museum and see some of her old associates there, including dear old Professor Frimodt; and then, perhaps, she would call in at Mrs Ellerton's and perhaps they would both look in at the Club. The programme smiled to her for the moment, and she hastened to carry it out, and soon found herself in the Professor's den.

"Ah," he said, smoothing down his nose, as he always did when he was particularly pleased. "If Justice were properly carried out in this world, you would not be allowed to see your old Professor again, having neglected him so long. Fortunately for us all, my sweet young miss, Justice generally miscarries! And Monsieur, your attendant?"

"He is not with me," Nora said, smiling a little timidly.

"Ah, excellent!" said the Professor, rubbing his hands together. "What? Gone, dead, buried like my famous poets? *Tant mieux!*"

"No, no;" said Nora, "I only meant he was not with me to-day."

"Ah, well," said the Professor, thoughtfully, "but

you may always kill and bury him when you wish. It is so simple, my sweet young miss."

"Is it so simple, Professor?" she asked, with a strange appeal in her voice.

"Why, of course!" he said, looking at her closely. Then he added:

"Nothing easier, indeed! See how I arrange with my poor poets. Ah, I have a long list of dead bodies. Come, Mademoiselle Nora, look at it — and here are some of their immortal poems which perished in one moment! You remember your Danish? Of course — of course. Now you see, this rascal knew how to write when he said those words about Liberty. But he had to die. It was the beginning and the end of the rascal, And it is always like that with your old Professor — such cruel disappointments — always in trouble!"

Nora read the poem aloud in Danish, much to the Professor's satisfaction. She herself had brightened up wonderfully, and there was a flush of pleasure and awakened interest on her pale face. She felt the renewal of life in her.

"Why have I left all this?" she thought.

"Yes," said the Professor, taking off his gold-rimmed spectacles and polishing them. "I have killed and buried a great number of these rascals during my long life. I assure you, Mademoiselle, it was only one rascal I spared. He was a great one. I did once think wonders of him! He was to be my prince of poets, and for a long time I believed in him (no one else did), and I had not the cruel heart to kill him. For it was myself — your old Professor. Perhaps I still choose to believe in that rogue, but no one knows except myself — and now you. See, I have told you a secret! And why have I told you?"

"I don't know, Professor," Nora said, smiling kindly at her old comrade, who had been good to her for so many years.

"Because, Mademoiselle," he said, fidgeting with some printed sheets which lay on his table, "because I wanted to make the impression on you that the last rascal one must ever think of killing and burying is one's self. *Voilà!* There is a puzzle for you."

Then he showed her some rare new books and curious old manuscripts, and finally took her to the door.

"There will be no admittance after more than six weeks' truancy," he said, putting his finger up in playful warning. "By that time I shall find a new genius, and Mademoiselle Nora and I will bury him together!"

But when she was gone he sat in his chair, folded his arms, and shook his head gravely.

"Her dear old father was right," he said. "She has changed sadly. My sweet Mademoiselle Nora. She has a tender place in my tough old heart. Ah, if one could be young again. Well, well, and now to work."

Nora meanwhile, passing on her way to Mrs Ellerton's, said to herself:

"My kind old Professor. And I had not seen him for fifteen months."

Then she began wondering why she had not seen him or any of her friends; and when the remembrance of Theodore Bevan stole over her as though in answer to her unconscious questioning, the old indifference and lethargy returned with a sudden bound. And although she was within ten minutes of Mrs Ellerton's cosy little flat, where she knew a warm welcome awaited her at any time, she retraced her steps and came straight home, impelled to do so but much against her real inclination.

CHAPTER III

MADGE CARSON IN DISTRESS

NORA relapsed into her usual state of indifference to every one except Theodore Bevan. It so happened, too, that he had an accident with his lamp, and burnt his right hand severely. This occurrence, particularly trying to him in one way, was opportune in another, for it gave him a renewed hold on Nora, and, at the same time, gratified that part of his strange nature which was becoming more and more susceptible to tender influences. At this time there were only a few left-handed scrawls in the journal. This was one of them:

"My right hand severely burnt. Great hindrance, but curious example of compensation in my Athene's renewed kindness and submissiveness, which seemed to be in jeopardy after that unfortunate visit to the Cummings'."

This was another:

"Pain in hand still bad. But I greatly enjoy my Athene's anxious kindness to me. There would almost seem to be a luxury in suffering, when some one is good enough to be sympathetic."

A few days after Bevan's health had become more normal again, and the thermometer of anxiety and sympathy had also returned to the normal, Mrs Ellerton called, on the chance of finding Nora at home; and the two friends, who had not seen each other for many months, settled down for a long and cosy chat. Nora was delighted to see her old playmate, and it was almost

pathetic how she broke through her listlessness and indifference. Mrs Ellerton had been away for a long time, travelling about, as usual, in search of health for her husband.

"Of course, my dear, we shall never find it," she said, cheerfully. "We continue to go to all the health-resorts strongly recommended by all the leading doctors, who have never been to them. I notice that the distances prescribed for us are becoming greater and greater. A few thousand miles are being added each time to our various destinations. I cannot possibly imagine where we shall be sent next. Meanwhile, I am thankful to say we are stationary for a few minutes in a flat in Kensington. It is a great rest, and I am enjoying myself deeply. And I have taken the first opportunity of coming over to see you."

"I nearly came to see you the other day," Nora said, "but I turned back half-way. I felt I wanted to have a long talk with you."

"And then you changed your mind when you were near me," Mrs Ellerton said, quaintly. "That did not say much for my magnetic power. Well, I forgive you, Nora, dear, and now for your news."

"Oh, everything is going on as usual," Nora said, "and there is nothing much to tell you."

Then, with a sudden impulse, she added:

"Except that I am engaged to be married."

"That is generally considered an interesting piece of news," Mrs Ellerton said, brightly. "Anything more?"

"I am going to be married in three or four months' time," Nora continued.

"Anything more?" asked Mrs Ellerton.

"I am going to marry a man called Theodore Bevan," Nora said.

"Well, my dear, I have not the advantage of Mr Bevan's acquaintance," said Mrs Ellerton, "but I hope he will be good to you, and keep his health!"

And the little woman bent over to Nora, and kissed her.

It was the first genial word that Nora had ever heard about her engagement, and it acted on her like a tonic. Some of her old cheeriness returned to her; and in a short time, the two friends were laughing and talking so light-heartedly, that their voices sounded like music to Nora's old father, who happened to come home just then.

"My Nora laughing!" he said, as he crept quietly into his den. It was so seldom that she laughed now.

Mrs Ellerton did not ask any questions about Theodore Bevan, but Nora spoke of him of her own accord, and said she admired his fine sense of justice, and his entire freedom from malice and all uncharitableness.

"He is not tender by nature," she said. "But his tenderness is growing daily, like some frail plant exposed at last to favourable conditions."

Mrs Ellerton made no comment on this remark: she had not travelled her thousands of miles without learning tact and discretion.

But later on, when a suitable occasion presented itself:

"Yes," she said. "Men are rough creatures. They have to be tamed. I must say it is pathetic when they first show real signs of being influenced by the gentler emotions. Of course they make shocking pretences at it for their own benefit; but when the real thing comes, there is no mistaking it. I was nearly melted to tears the other day when my Tom discovered, after eight years of ignorance on the point, that I often suffered from shocking neuralgic headaches, and that I was passion-

ately fond of Shakspeare's plays, and never got a chance of seeing them. It was quite a tragedy. You see, poor dears, they learn very slowly. You must not expect too much at first, Nora. It takes a lifetime!"

And Nora laughed, in spite of herself. Many a bit of fun, of schoolgirl's fun, grown-up girl's fun, young womanhood's fun, had she and Bessie Ellerton had over every sort and condition of man. Ah, if men could only know how women laugh at them!

"Your experiences are not very encouraging," Nora said, cheerfully. "But then Mr Bevan is an exceptional man, and he will learn more quickly than most of them. It is wonderful to me how receptive and impressionable he has become: I am always being touched by his child-like need of kindness."

Mrs Ellerton said nothing. She nodded her head sympathetically, and after that they passed away from the subject. If she had heard anything about Nora's engagement, she at least concealed her knowledge with admirable judgment. Instead of commenting on the character of the man to whom Nora had pledged herself, she gave a spirited account of her travels during the last ten months; and in conclusion she said:

"So now we have threshed out the question of Arizona, and I am thankful to say that we shall never go there again, and that my complexion will be saved. It was becoming exactly like a piece of crumpled tissue-paper. That was the last straw. A woman can do without Shakspeare and Ibsen, and even Herbert Spencer and Dante, but she cannot get along with any comfort or self-respect without a complexion. Tom has promised solemnly never to take me to Arizona again, and I am really grateful to him. Yes, my dear old Nora, after eight years of married life, my Tom is learning to be

human. It looks very much as though we only learnt some of the human virtues when we have not a great deal of time left to practise them. Take my advice, and be careful to encourage your sweetheart's efforts to think occasionally of you instead of himself. But don't be disheartened by failure. For it is a huge undertaking, Nora!"

And Nora, poor child, said:

"I am not likely to be disheartened, Bessie. I know what strides I have already made."

Mrs Ellerton glanced at her friend's face, grown whiter and thinner, and some words rose to her lips, but she checked them at once.

And then Nora, closing her eyes, said:

"Arizona — what does that name recall to me? Oh, yes, I know. Nurse Isabel reading out of a geography-book to Mr Uppingham."

Her mind went back to the day when she first visited Brian.

"Ah," said Mrs Ellerton, "and what about Nurse Isabel? Have you seen her lately?"

"No," replied Nora. "On closer acquaintance, I did not care for her. I thought she was not quite steady."

Mrs Ellerton laughed.

"My dear girl, since when have you become so highly fastidious? Moreover, Isabel is miles steadier than most so-called steady people. If you are thinking of ostracising Nurse Isabel, I will supply you with a list, a very long list, of far more deserving cases."

Nora made no answer. Mrs Ellerton, who was leisurely putting on her veil and gloves, continued:

"I can tell you this about Isabel: she has been a brick to an ill-tempered old mother, has supported her, borne

with her, and loved her, and kept steady and straight for her sake — and amid many dangers, specially tempting to a frivolous character like hers. And that, my dear girl, is the only real virtue. You and I probably have not had the chance of being virtuous, because we probably have not had the temptation of being unvirtuous."

"I think you are right," Nora said, "and I have been forgetting."

She put her hand up to her head, as though she were in some mental distress.

"Bessie," she said, "do you think that one person can ever really succeed in stamping out the nature, character, and temperament of another person, so as to leave no faintest trace behind?"

"No," said Mrs Ellerton, "I don't believe it possible. Something remains. Think how often one hears of friends, or relations, or husbands and wives bearing and forbearing with each other, giving in, acting, compromising, pretending. But when illness or death comes near, and the mask is laid aside, then one sees the true character, intact or in pieces, but still there. But why should you ask me that?"

"I have been wondering about it lately," Nora said, dreamily. "I think nothing remains."

"Don't you become morbid," Mrs Ellerton said, shaking her head. "Do you remember how you used to arrive at the right moment, and rescue me bodily from 'catacomb-land,' as we called it?"

"It was a good name," Nora said, smiling.

"And an abominable place," Mrs Ellerton said, kissing her. "Don't go there, unless you can't help it. But if you do go, send for me."

Nora saw her off, and was just closing the front door, when Mrs Ellerton came hurrying back.

"My dear, I've forgotten the very mission on which I came," she said. "It went out of my mind until we spoke of catacomb-land."

She then told Nora that she was in great trouble about a friend who, during Mrs Ellerton's absence abroad, had been missed for several months from the social life of the Eagle Club. No one knew what had become of her, until lately, when she was found in a poor part of Kentish Town, ill and poor, and most difficult to help by reason of her pride and reticence. She had had a severe attack of scarlet fever, and, owing to a continued state of weakness after she had left the hospital, ulceration of the cornea of the eyes set in. It was thought that this would in time yield to treatment, good fare, and care. But there lay the difficulty; for she was alone, and seemed to have no incentive to get better. Report said that before her illness some overwhelming grief had broken her spirit.

"I have been doing my best for her," Mrs Ellerton said, "but, as you know, I am always afraid of being sent spinning off to the other end of the world, and then she would be left entirely to herself again; for several other people have tried to be good to her, and have been repulsed. She is very *difficile*. Now, I have set my heart on securing your help, Nora, and I feel sure you are the right person; for when you are not in the catacombs yourself, you have a way about you quite irresistible. She would feel the force of your vitality and the charm of your simple geniality, and she would not be afraid of you catechising her and prying into her troubles. I assure you, she wants help as much as any one I've ever known, and you are the one to give it."

"Oh, Bessie," Nora said, her poor troubled heart cheered by these words of praise, "I don't think I should

do much good. There is nothing genial about me now. I feel so different from what I used to be. I have not any go left in me."

"You have quite enough for poor little Madge Carson," Mrs Ellerton said.

"Madge Carson!" said Nora.

"Why, do you know her?" Mrs Ellerton asked.

"I have seen her once," Nora said. "And we did not hit it off."

Mrs Ellerton looked disappointed.

"Then I suppose you won't go," she said, "and I had set my heart on it."

"Oh, if you wish it so much, I will go," said Nora, "but I don't think she would consent to see me if she knew my name."

"But she need n't know it," said Mrs Ellerton, cheering up again. "She won't recognise you — poor little child. Her eyes are in such a state that she can't distinguish people in the least, and I can easily say I am sending a dear friend. Leave all that to me."

Nora hesitated.

"Of course I will go," she said — "I will go to-morrow."

"You are a dear!" Mrs Ellerton said, kissing her, and she went off saying to herself:

"My poor Nora. And this is what he has been making of you."

And Nora thought:

"What a pleasure to see an old friend. Bessie has changed. She takes a brighter view of life. And I have changed too, and my brightness has gone. And why? Am I unhappy or anxious? Or what is it?"

The next morning Nora started off to the address given in Kentish Town. Having once made up her

mind, she was touchingly eager to be of use to this little stricken girl. It was the first time for many months that she had taken any trouble about any one except Theodore Bevan, and she felt an almost childlike pleasure in the undertaking; just as we all feel, when, after a long period of listlessness and irresponsibility, we are suddenly entrusted with a task, and are allowed the dignity and buoyancy of believing that we alone can accomplish it successfully. She bought a few little delicacies, and at length arrived at her destination. The door of the little house was opened by a good-tempered woman, who, in reply to Nora's inquiry after Miss Carson, pointed to the top of the stairs.

"But you'll have a job to see her if you aren't an intimate," the woman said, looking at Nora with distinct approval. "She is terrible unsociable — poor little creature."

Nora mentioned that she had been sent by Mrs Ellerton, and would take her chance of being dismissed, and passed up-stairs. She knocked at the door, and, after some delay, a voice said, "Come in." Nora went in, and saw Madge Carson lying on the bed.

"Is that you, Mrs Ellerton?" she asked, without even turning her face from the wall. "I wish you would not trouble about me."

"It is not Mrs Ellerton," Nora said, gently. "But I am a friend of hers, and very anxious to see if there was anything I could do for you."

When Nora was at her best, there was something soothing in her voice. The face held so persistently to the wall turned towards Nora.

"Mrs Ellerton wrote of you to me, only this morning," the girl said. "She said I was not to be disagreeable to you. I will try, but it is a difficult matter."

"You would not find it very difficult if you knew how eager I was to come," Nora said, as she drew up a chair to the bedside. "I have not been thinking of any one but myself for many months. I have been out of the running of everything; and when Bessie Ellerton told me about you yesterday, and suggested that I might venture to call, I felt as though a new path had opened out to me — a path which was wide enough to contain some one else as well as myself."

"Yes, I know one feels like that sometimes," the girl said, wearily, and relapsed into silence and moodiness. Nora made no attempt to engage her in conversation, but, in the quietest way possible, set about preparing some nourishing food which she had brought with her, and coaxed the fire into a more pronounced existence. It was a dim light on this February afternoon, but Nora, knowing about Madge's eye-trouble, did not like to suggest lamp or candle.

When the cup of food was ready, she brought it to the bedside, but to her surprise the girl raised herself and said:

"I think I will sit by the fire. How good of you to do all this for me! And I have been so sulky all the time. You will find a lamp on the table in the corner. I shall not mind the light so long as I don't face it."

She got off the bed, and groped her way to the easy-chair, which Nora had put ready for her.

"Oh, I'm horribly weak," she said. "The days go on, and I get no better. I am sick and tired of going to that hospital to have my eyes seen to. I ought to have gone to-day."

"You must let me take you next time," Nora said, kindly. "You ought not to neglect that."

Madge made no answer, but sipped the gruel, and nodded her head approvingly.

"Miss Graham," she said, more cheerily than she had yet taken the trouble to speak to her visitor, "this *is* good. I believe you have put some whisky into it!"

Nora laughed, and owned that she had, and encouraged by Madge's appreciation and growing friendliness, came to the fireside, and made herself some tea, and chatted away with some of her old animation. She spoke of Mrs Ellerton, and of the fun they always had over the doctors, and the long distances; and then, strange to say, she found herself drifting to the subject of her old father, and her friends at the King's Head. Something tugged at her heart when Madge Carson said:

"Ah, you are a lucky girl to have your father still. A father never forsakes one."

Once or twice Nora rose to go, but Madge begged her to stay on.

"You have done me good by coming," she said. "Somehow or other I knew when you first spoke that you would not harass me by questions and commiseration, but would just take me as I was. I wish I could see you. I am sure you have a dear kind face. I feel as though I should never be able to see any one or anything again. But the doctors say that as I get stronger, I shall regain my sight."

"Then you must get stronger," Nora said.

"Oh yes, perhaps," she answered, shrugging her shoulders. "I have not yet begun to try seriously, but I suppose I shall try. We all do, whether we have anything to live for, or whether we are merely pelicans in the wilderness. I suppose it is the old instinct of self-preservation."

"Are you quite alone in the world?" Nora asked, gently.

"I was not alone until lately — just before my illness," Madge said. "Then suddenly, without any warning, my beautiful goblet of happiness was dashed to the ground."

After this, she crouched over the fire, made no attempt at conversation, and finally lay down on the bed and retired into herself.

Nora, who had lit the lamp and screened it, glanced at the little book-binder, and was shocked to see the alteration in her appearance: for illness and misery had made havoc of her. She was touched to her very heart to see this little girl in such desolate surroundings, and without even the comfort of being able to do her beautiful work. There was something pathetic in the sight of her neglected bench and all the paraphernalia of her craft huddled together in the corner. Nora's heart went out to her, and she felt that Mrs Ellerton was right in saying that here indeed was some one who needed help. Many thoughts rushed through her mind. Had Bessie Ellerton known about Madge's previous meeting with Nora, or was it just one of those strange coincidences which are not so strange after all, considering the smallness of an ordinary person's chessboard of life? Did Madge Carson know who she was, or had she, to please Mrs Ellerton, received Mrs Ellerton's friend on trust? Oh well, it did not matter. They had been brought together in this unexpected way, and Nora realised that there was a curious feeling of satisfaction and excitement in her heart. What would it all end in? What would Theodore Bevan say? He must not know.

Full of these reflections, she lingered on a while, and then, seeing that she could be of no further use that day,

she bent over Madge to say good-bye. Madge Carson lifted up her face to be kissed.

"Come to me again soon," she whispered. "Come to-morrow."

Nora was late home that evening, and she learnt that Theodore Bevan had waited for some time, and had been obliged to leave. There were a few pencilled lines for her:

"Where can you have been, my Athene? I am desolate, lose all my bearings, my very identity, without you."

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORIAN LOVES AND WORKS

ROGER PENHURST had said to Nora:

"Brave men do not give up their life's work because women break their hearts."

It was at least true of Brian Uppingham that he went on with his work, and found his legitimate comfort in being able to use his talents and abilities. Only those who by untoward circumstances have been forced into inactivity, or uncongenial activity, can realise the rapture with which these outcasts enter once more into their inheritance. It is like the gladness of spring-time. It is like the glow in a maiden's heart in the presence of her lover. It is like a renewal of fellowship with the gods themselves. And all the time, whatever it is, or is not, beautiful and bright floods of sunshine illumine the heart and brain with a rich lustre of gratitude.

Sometimes, alas! the impassable barriers guarding the divine inheritance are broken down too late, and the Worker with fading eyes may only dimly recognise his own fair kingdom.

"And this was mine, and now is mine once more!" he cries.

And with the pride of recovered sovereignty, the Worker's spirit passes away from beyond all possibilities of boundary into the Greater Inheritance. But not always even this much of mercy is vouchsafed him, and sometimes those barriers are never broken down. He

stands outside them and dies standing — without one moment's thrill of hope and rapture.

But Brian's fate was a happier one, and not only was he rejoicing at having reconquered his kingdom, but he was conscious that his strength of brain and mind had been quietly increasing during that long time of illness and waiting. At first he did not realise it, but as the weeks went on and his difficulties of working and thinking resolved themselves into a simpler problem, he found that he had gained and not lost by his enforced idleness. This alone was an inexpressible joy to him, one of life's compensations for his great soreness in having lost Nora for the time. But he firmly believed that he had not altogether lost her.

"Some day she will say again: 'Brian is waiting,'" he said to himself often and often.

Every morning of his life he put on his writing-desk a photograph of Nora, given to him by her father. Very tenderly he leaned it against the maiden-hair fern, and when his hours of work were over, very tenderly he transferred it to his breast-pocket.

He made tremendous strides with the continuation of his History, and as it was necessary for a nature like his to seek encouragement and sympathy, he sought and found it in Nora's father. Every page was read over and approved of or condemned by Roger Penhurst.

"Good!" the old man would say, with a quick nod of appreciation.

"Damned bad!" he would say on other occasions. "Dull as ditch water. Pluck it out and cast it from thee."

"But it is my best bit of all," Brian would answer, defiantly.

"It is the duty of all writers to get rid of all their

best bits," Roger would answer. "And you know it, Uppingham."

Roger was generally right in his criticisms, and after a suitable amount of obstinacy, the historian gave in.

Apart from Brian's own personal work, he went out freely, and enjoyed the companionship of many leading men of the day, in politics and science. His happiest hours were spent in the laboratory of a great chemist, where, as an eager scholar, he learnt some of the wonders of modern scientific research. It was during this time that his friend discovered the presence in the air of a hitherto unknown gas, and it was Brian himself who had the delight of writing the account in the 'Times' which announced to the world this most important discovery. It was one of his great charms that he could enter with whole-hearted enthusiasm into the region of other people's work totally different from his own, offering always the best of his abilities to help in any humble way whatsoever. The music of his life, whatever its quality or limitations, was at least free from that modern peculiarity of an undue insistence of the personal note. So, in this much-loved scientific haven, he got away from himself, his writings, and everything indeed which combines both to help and hamper a literary career; and he was not often tempted into Puppet Land, though he went sometimes and took his place in the Peep Show. He came back full of enjoyment, and brimming over with quaint comment. He was, in fact, like an unspoiled child, who had not been to too many tea-parties. But on the few occasions when he was present, he took in all the details in his own direct way. He was so unworldly himself, that nothing impressed him so much as the restless striving after place, position and social influence.

"It is incredible," he said, "that people should care so much." Once he put the question to one of the brightest and smartest of Society hostesses.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me, do you really care so desperately for this kind of life and atmosphere?"

"Desperately," she answered, smiling. "And do you know why? Because it was a great struggle to attain to it. At one time I thought others had outstripped me in the race of social importance. But I gathered myself together and sped on. Only one has always to be on the alert, otherwise a rival gets an undue advantage."

"How very curious," Brian said, speaking as though he had been told of the habits and characters of an unknown race. "How very curious and interesting."

She glanced at him to make sure that he was not ridiculing her, and saw that he was just his whole-hearted self. His simplicity and unworldliness touched a soft note of respect in her heart. Later on in the evening she sought him out again.

"Some day," she said, "I will tell you something more about this fight for social existence and importance, and then you will understand better the working of the wheel within wheel, the intricacies and entanglements and the propelling forces. And you will sum us up very gently, showing all our weaknesses, but not forgetting our bit of strength and our bit of pathos."

But that evening, when she had retired to her room, Mrs de Lancy, flushed with the triumph of a specially successful function, at which many distinguished people of rank, fortune, and fame were present, thought of Brian Uppingham, and a tender smile passed over her face.

"Yes," she said, aloud, "and he may well look upon

us as some strange far-off tribe who have a peculiar way of 'throwing the spear.'"

Brian had the unconscious power of making people think of him. It was all the same whether it was a Mrs Mary Shaw, a Mrs de Lancy, David the blacksmith, the famous chemist, the Master of Trinity, Wullie — any one. He had been born to be loved by women, by men, by children, and by animals. He had no idea how greatly women were drawn to him. He went on his way, looking neither to the right nor the left. Nora was ever before him — in the distance it is true, but still a distinct vision, which he would see until his eyes could see no more. And he clung to her old father with a persistence which was a curious mixture of the desire to protect and the craving to be protected and helped. If two or three days passed by, and Roger did not put in his appearance at Mecklenburg Square, Brian became uneasy, and sought for him in all his haunts. He often found him in Westminster Abbey. The verger told Brian that his habit was to remain there for hours.

"I suppose he is in trouble," the man said, kindly. "Many people who are distressed come here, and sit in the dim light and soothing quietness. I know them so well. They never speak. They just wander about dreamily by themselves, and then sink in some corner and rest. Indeed, sir, there could well be written many and many a story about the people who come here to be comforted."

Sometimes Brian found him in the Egyptian Room of the British Museum.

"Ah," he said once, "you have given me the slip for three days, and now I find you mooning about literally in Egyptian darkness. Come home to me now. I miss you so dreadfully when you forsake me."

"My dear lad," the old man said, "I should have got on very badly all this time but for you."

And arm in arm the two friends went to Brian's home. There was no need of any explanation on those black days: Brian knew that Roger Penhurst was fretting about Nora, and that the time was speeding on towards her marriage.

But one morning Roger arrived in excellent spirits and looking years younger.

"Nora and the centipede had some falling out," he said, cheerily. "She has been visiting a friend of hers who is ill, and once or twice she has not come home until late. Her manner to him is undergoing a change. She does not seem nearly so cowed at times. All the same, he has a most extraordinary hold on her. And yet she refused the other evening to account to him for her late return. He generally comes in at six. It was fully eight when she arrived.

"'I have had things to see after,' she said, quite airily.

"'You would surely wish to tell me what those things were,' he said.

"'No, Theodore,' she answered. 'I don't care to be coerced into accounting for every minute of my time. Father never asked it of me.'

"We were all thunderstruck — herself included. She looked frightened after that, and relapsed into her usual submissive manner, but he went away, much annoyed, though he said nothing. I suppose I am an old fool to feel encouraged by this trifling incident, but one never gets too old to be a fool, thank Heaven!"

He took heart from that day forth, and mentally lay in wait for further developments. Brian impressed on him the wisdom of not interfering.

"Don't seem to notice any difference," he said. "Above all, don't make any alteration in your everyday habits. Just go quietly on."

But his own heart beat faster. Could it be that the first brick of the barrier between himself and Nora had been broken down? He knew, just as her father knew, that directly her own will-power began to assert itself again — even in a trifling matter — then also would his own chances of regaining her begin to take form and substance. He had not any idea that Theodore Bevan had been coupling his name with Nurse Isabel's, and trying to poison Nora against him. He trusted her implicitly himself, and believed so thoroughly that she was passing through a bad time of impotence and ignorance, from which she would emerge strong and free. It never struck him to doubt her absolute belief in him. And Roger had not told him what Nora had said against him and Nurse Isabel, partly because it was too painful, and partly because he did not believe that Nora really entertained any doubts of Brian's entire loyalty. Her doubts were mere pretences conjured up by the evil magician's wand.

But one day Brian found it out by himself, in the most ordinary manner. He had not been forgetting that Nurse Isabel's character had been slandered, and that in some mysterious way her best doctors had been warned against her. She had been a long time out of work, and one or two rivals, whom she detested with true womanly hatred, had been deputed to take charge of the cases which usually fell to her share.

"Being lack'd and lost," she began to think more indulgently of all the dull bishops, authors, philosophers, and irritable old ladies whom she had nursed. And she fretted about her old mother. How was she to give her

those little luxuries which had become such a necessity? Well, she could easily sell some of her stamps and other treasures, and raise a few shillings that way until the luck turned again, and if it did not turn, then she would have to sell herself. Her mother need not know, and she herself would not care — no one would care. And then she thought of Brian, and her mood changed at once. A wonderful tenderness diffused itself in her heart and spirit.

"No," she said to herself. "As long as I have a friend in a man like that, I will not do anything to forfeit his esteem. I would rather go and ask him to give or lend me money, and thus help me over this bad wave. And meantime, I will go and look up one or two of my doctors."

So she went to one of the houses in Richardson Street, and waited for a long time in the depressing reception-room, until a long procession of consulting visitors had paid in their separate two guineas, and received their separate two minutes' advice and examination. Then there came a pause, and during this interval Nurse Isabel was summoned by the reproachful-looking man-servant into the great specialist's sanctum. He looked up from his papers as she came in, and nodded good morning in a kindly enough manner. He was by nature a kind man, and success had not robbed him of his birthright. Like most doctors — whether leading London specialists or obscure country practitioners — he was guilty of innumerable acts of generous helpfulness, not even guessed at by the outside world.

"I am afraid I have no case for you just at present, Nurse Isabel," he said, a little brusquely.

"I am badly in want of one, doctor," she said.

He looked at her, and his face relaxed. He had

always rather liked Nurse Isabel, and had often perversely judged her suitable for the most unsuitable cases.

"The fact is," he said, "unpleasant reports have reached me about you. I cannot afford to employ any nurse who earns a doubtful name for herself. There is too much of that sort of thing nowadays, and I have felt obliged to cross you out of my book. I am very sorry —yes, I am very sorry."

He rose, as all doctors do when they desire to put an end to the interview.

"It is entirely a false accusation," Nurse Isabel said, quietly. "I may not be an ideal nurse, either in action or aspiration, but I am not a woman of loose character; and, I think, it is due to me that you should, at least, tell me the name of your informant."

"I had it direct from one of my colleagues, Dr Morgan," the specialist said; "and you know that he himself has refused you work. I am not here to decide upon the truth or falsehood of these unpleasant charges against your good name. I merely say that I do not care to go on employing a nurse who is being talked about. It is undesirable and impossible—"

The bell rang, and the man-servant announced another member of the morning's procession.

"Another time, Nurse Isabel," the doctor said, closing his eyes, and waving his hand vaguely towards the door. Nurse Isabel stepped out into the street, and then paused a moment.

"When a woman is reported to have lost her good name," she said to herself, "she might just as well go and lose it in earnest, for the world will never again believe in her virtue."

For a long time she wandered about, and fought a good fight in her mind. Then she went straight back

to her lonely lodging, and wrote Brian Uppingham a cheery little note which she read with satisfaction.

"I went to my best specialist to-day, Dr James Mathers, and he told me that he had taken my name off his books, in consequence of some reports which had reached him. It has been a great blow to me, for I always regarded him as my best card. However, I am bearing up with saint-like courage; and, if the worst comes to the worst, I can at least become a plague nurse. People won't be over-squeamish about the morals or immorals of a plague nurse, and she will be indulgently allowed to sacrifice her life for the benefit of others, even although there may be ugly reports going round. I believe this is all the work of that little wretch Theodore Bevan. And the worst of it is that the ball once set rolling always rolls, because every one takes a pleasure in giving it an extra kick."

When Brian received this letter, he sat thinking and wondering what to do. He was divided between the desire to go and give Bevan another shaking, and the more sensible plan of visiting Dr James Mathers and trying to set things straight for Nurse Isabel. He chose the latter course. He got a letter of personal introduction to Dr Mathers from his friend the chemist, and sent it in with the usual application for a professional interview. The specialist was glad to see him, and welcomed him.

"But I am sorry you need my help," he said. "I thought you were all right, and pegging away at the continuation of your History."

"Yes, I am all right," Brian answered, "and I have come to see you, not about myself, but about a matter which has distressed me."

He then spoke of Nurse Isabel, and he ended by saying:

"She may be vain and frivolous, but not worse than most people, and at least she knows it, which most people do not. I stake my own honour on her stability."

Dr Mathers looked at him with an amused but somewhat puzzled smile.

"It is strange that you should be the one to come and plead for this woman," he said.

"I don't see that it is strange," Brian answered. "She is down on her luck, and a number of lies are being told about her, and I simply come forward to speak up for her. I ought to know something about her, considering she nursed me for nearly three months."

"You are supposed to know a great deal about her," Dr Mathers answered, grimly.

Brian stared.

"It is your name which is being chiefly coupled with hers," the specialist added. "Therefore I may well think it strange that you should come and plead for her to me. It is not the fashion for us men to care greatly about the fate of the women whom we drag down."

But even as Dr Mathers spoke, he noticed the look of unutterable astonishment on his visitor's face. Brian might have sustained a severe but subtle shock. His colour became ashen.

"I have never dragged her down," he said, quietly. "If it is only my name which is doing an injury to her good name, then I can doubly testify to the utter falseness of the reports, and can trace them direct to their origin. Our names have been coupled together in order to injure us both in the eyes of some one very dear to her and to me, dearer than life and light. It looks after all as though I had been dragging Nurse Isabel down, if she is to be included in a mean revenge

measured out principally for me. But there has never been anything questionable between us."

The quiet dignity of the man carried its own value wherever he went. The great specialist, so accustomed to observe and analyse, knew that he was dealing with a good and pure-hearted man. But he said nothing; he was not a man of many words. He opened a large note-book and played absently with his stylographic pen.

Then he spoke:

"I do myself the honour, Mr Uppingham, of believing entirely in your honour. And you see I am writing Nurse Isabel's name in my book again. If she has a friend like you to plead for her, she must be worth retaining. I am quite sure of that."

He grasped Brian warmly by the hand, and when alone, he leaned back in his chair and thought of him with a peculiar kind of tenderness.

"A dear fellow," he said, with a smile.

Even after a long procession of clients and coins, and all the ills and aches of suffering modern rich humanity, his mind wandered away to Brian.

"A dear fellow," he said again, "and as clear as crystal."

CHAPTER V

A HEART'S OUTPOURING

ROGER PENHURST followed Brian's advice, and appeared to be taking no notice of the change which was coming over Nora's extraordinary infatuation. He studied his Persian with redoubled enthusiasm, and did not give any sign of desiring her companionship. But he often saw her looking at him with wistful eyes, and it required a strong effort of self-control to prevent him from throwing off the mask of indifference, which fitted him so uncomfortably. He longed to take her to his heart again. He longed to ask her to listen to some fine old Italian melodies which he had unearthed. But he tried to be wise, and let her go her own way; and although she had referred several times to the friend whom she was nursing, he asked no questions, and merely told her that he was glad that she had some one in whom to be interested. Theodore Bevan, on the other hand, knew nothing about Nora's visits to a sick friend, and he could not account for her variability of mood and manner.

He wrote in his journal:

"My Athene is most trying at times. Still, I have every hope of subduing her. I am often at a loss which weapon to employ: the weapon of being alone and unloved in the world, or the weapon of tenderness, or of masterfulness. But it is worth the trouble, and, by God! when she is thoroughly tamed, *she shall remain tamed.* I have a strong hold on her, although she is always trying to shake herself free. But she shall not escape

from me. And I do not intend to do without her. She is the only being that has ever roused in me the faintest idea of love — And I will have her, and to do what I like with. She shall not thwart me like this — no one shall thwart me. I have set my heart on her, my will on her; and the stronger her desire to slip away from me, the stronger my determination to hold her against all odds. . . . Can it be that she has heard things against me and that she is beginning to doubt my sense of justice and my wonderful freedom from malice and all uncharitableness?"

He decided on the wisest plan in the circumstances, and used the irresistible weapon of being alone and unloved in the world.

"There is a shadow on your heart about me, my Athene," he said, very gently, one evening, when he came in and found her in her wonted place at home. She had never been late after the one occasion when she had refused to give any account of her movements. "There is a shadow on your heart about me."

He looked miserable, and in the very last stages of decline. It was most curious what a power he had of suddenly making himself appear as though at death's door. That ashen look on his face always went straight to Nora's heart, and he knew it.

"Do not ever desert me," he said, smiling at her with indescribable pathos and appeal. "You have all my life's happiness — yes, and my life itself in your hands. You led me out of my death-like loneliness, and made me live and love. It is your duty to stand by me. The day you turn from me, my Athene, will be my last day on earth."

After this, Nora had another wave of tenderness for him, and Bevan was satisfied that his influence over her

remained unimpaired. But he wished to push on the wedding, which had been arranged for June. When, however, he suggested this to her, she would not hear of it. So he let it alone; but sometimes he brought in a wedding present for her; and the very way in which he offered it was pathetic in itself.

"You see I have no relations who would naturally offer you a gift of greeting. So I must be my own mother and father, my own uncles and aunts, my own cousins."

He brought her beautiful gifts, carefully chosen ones too: books and pictures, and fine old silver.

"This is what my aunt sends you," he said, pointing to a splendid old Queen Anne's silver tea-service, and smiling with a kind of melancholy pride.

Nora was touched by his devotion to her, and ashamed of all her conflicting emotions and doubts; for he had never lost the power of making her feel in the wrong. She was always uneasy about him, and went through miseries of self-reproach when she wounded his sensitiveness by doubt or neglect or indifference. All the same, she was nearer to emancipation than she knew. She had been endlessly kind to little Madge Carson, who had proved at first a most unmanageable subject. Her moroseness and ungraciousness were so persistent, that Nora began to feel the task an impossible one, and wrote so to Mrs Ellerton, who had suddenly sailed for South Africa. And one day she told Madge Carson that she would not be coming again.

"You seem to resent my coming," Nora said. "If it were any pleasure to you, I should feel differently about it."

The only answer the girl gave, was to burst out crying.

"Oh, don't forsake me!" she cried. "I look forward so much to your visits. You don't know how much I look forward to them. It is just my horrid pride and reserve which make me such a boor; and then I am so miserable and down on my luck — that makes me a boor too. But, indeed, I am grateful, do believe that."

"My dear girl, I don't want gratitude," Nora said, bending over her. "I only wish to be sure that you do not prefer my absence to my presence. Come, cheer up! I won't forsake you, if you really want me. I assure you I am glad enough to have any one to help ever so little — and you more than any one. And you need a little companionship and kindness just now, and I need to give it. For, if you only knew, I am myself miserable enough. So you see it is a give-and-take, and you must not feel it necessary to your pride to be so forbidding and disagreeable. I understand all about the pride, and you can put it away quite light-heartedly. Some day, when your turn comes, I'll put mine away. Now, is that a bargain?"

The ice broke with a crash, and the two women drew closer together; and it was wonderful to see how Madge Carson began to gather up strength under these more favourable conditions of mind and spirit. With renewal of strength came renewal of hopefulness about her plans for the future. She put aside all her reserve, and every day endeared herself more and more to Nora. Bits of fun flashed out, sparks of mischief too; but generally, after an outburst of merriment, she fell into the depths of misery; and it was on one of these occasions that Nora ventured to ask her what was the nature of her secret trouble. She turned her almost blind eyes to Nora, as though wishing to scan her face.

"I think I should like to tell you," she said, and with-

out pausing a moment, she plunged into the story of her life. It seemed as though she were only too thankful to ease her heart to Nora, and all her thoughts and feelings and emotions came bounding out, glad to be released. She spoke about her school-days, her life at home, and her many ambitions.

"And just when I was in the hey-day of good health and good spirits, self containèdness and bumptiousness," she said, "I met a very strange little man, who first repelled me, and then attracted me, and then repelled me, and then attracted me — and held me fast. He had some subtle kind of mesmeric power, and he mesmerised me."

She paused, and Nora's heart beat faster. Was it right for her to go on listening, without telling Madge Carson who she really was? And yet there would be no harm done to any one — and Nora had a craving to hear the whole story in this untrammelled way. If she told Madge Carson that it was Nora Penhurst who had been tending her all these weeks, she knew that a barrier would immediately rise up between them — not unsurmountable, but still a temporary hindrance — and Nora felt she could brook no delay. So she gave no sign, and Madge Carson went on:

"One may call this curious influence by whatever name one chooses, but I do not pretend to be telling you anything sensational, or grotesquely out of the way. That is the affair of the fiction-writers: they are obliged to dress up their facts. But I only have to do with the fundamental idea. The man mesmerised me, and entirely against my will. I never wished to give in one inch to him, and yet before a few weeks were over, he had me completely in subjection, mind and spirit. It was my mind that he wanted to seduce; he let me recognise in his own subtle way how safe I was with him in all other

respects. And that gave him a tremendous power over me, and he knew it, and used it to wither up everything that was bright and joyous in my nature ——"

Nora bent forward and stirred the fire. Ah, she knew.

Madge continued:

"It was much more satisfaction to a character like his to make a mental wreck of a woman instead of merely entrapping her in the usual way. So he took the flowers of my mind, and turned them into hideous weeds, and I don't think any man can do a worse thing to any woman. He was full of rank poison, and his daily joy was to inject me with it. And I never knew. But those around me knew; and they tried to beat him off, as one might a foul reptile. I did not understand all that until afterwards. But there came a day when I awoke, and found myself alone and friendless. Every one had been successfully hounded away by him and by me, for he had taught me to see life through his eyes, and I had hurled my bolt of scorn and distrust against everything. But one day I awoke, and was free again. It was the day my darling old aunt died, and as I bent over her in those last moments, I realised in one flash of intelligence how I had hastened her end by her anxiety for me, and by my neglect and indifference, and by my scorn of her old age. And now it was all too late.

"'My darling,' she whispered, 'that man — your enemy — my ene——' The word died on her lips, but she looked imploringly to me. 'Auntie,' I cried, 'I see it all now — I am free from him — you must live, darling, and we will regain our happiness.' . . . A faint smile passed over her dear face, and she died."

Madge Carson buried her face in her hands, and seemed to have relapsed into a permanent silence. Nora

waited. Her face was very pale. The room was quite dark, save for the light of the fire; and there was no sound in the house, nor outside in the little by-street.

At last Madge went on:

"It took me many months to right myself from Theodore Bevan's influence, but, in the fulness of time, my spirit lifted itself up again, and a smile came back into my heart. I went away, and worked hard at book-binding and gold-tooling. That braced me up. But I missed him more than I can say — for he had wormed himself into my heart. I had to recall to myself sternly his mean-spiritedness, his paltriness, his quiet maliciousness."

"His maliciousness?" Nora said. "I had always thought him singularly free from malice."

But Madge did not heed her.

"And at last I recovered myself," she said. "And I made a sacred vow, that whenever I heard of Theodore Bevan in connection with any other woman, I would seek her out, no matter who she was, and warn her against that little human devil. Two occasions arose, and I fulfilled my vow. Of course, I did no good at the time. The Bishop's daughter said that doubtless I meant well, but that Theodore Bevan was not the man he appeared to my distorted vision; and when some stray truths came home to her, some unwelcome accentuations of her own secret misgivings, she wept on my shoulder, and then cried from rage for having been so weak, and then apologised for her temper. She seems later on to have rescued herself from his influence, and she married into the army. And the other woman——"

Nora bent nearer to her:

"Yes, and the other woman?" she said, eagerly.

"Ah, that is where all the trouble to me comes in," Madge Carson said, bitterly; "it is because I was fool enough to bother myself about that other woman, that I have been so cruelly punished. It was all wasted on her, and she could have very well looked after herself — hard, scornful creature — and I should have spared myself the injury which Theodore Bevan contrived as his revenge."

Nora's hands were clasped tightly over her knee. She bit her lips.

"Oh, it was a simple enough revenge," continued Madge Carson, in the same tone of bitterness; "but it was masterly because irresistible. I had picked up the threads of my life again, and I was engaged to a man whom I loved with all my heart — my employer — a master-bookbinder. I had never loved any one but him. I did not love Theodore Bevan. And coming after all that stress and strain of spirit, my love for him, and his for me, seemed like 'the white presences of the gods.' But suddenly he turned against me. I saw the change in him, and wondered what I could have done to offend, and then by degrees the truth came out. He had been told evil stories of me — *and he believed them.* Some one had taken my virtue, and torn it in shreds for me — and he saw it now only as a tattered rag. I do not judge him harshly, for the best of men believe at once evil things of a woman. It has always been so. And the best of women find it hard to believe evil things of a man; and when they are forced to believe, they forgive. It has always been so. But the whole thing broke me up; it ploughed into me terribly. He offered to continue to give me work — my gold-tooling was satisfactory, even if my character was not. But I could not accept it from him; and so I drifted into

indifference and poverty, and fell ill from scarlet fever. And you know the rest. But I sit and think of what my life might have been, if I had gone my own way, and let Theodore Bevan go his — unchecked. Then I should have kept my love, and not known that he would have doubted me and turned from me if the test came."

"And are you sure that it was Theodore Bevan who spread these reports against you?" Nora asked.

"Absolutely sure," Madge Carson answered. "I heard it from my master-bookbinder himself. No one else but Bevan could have thrown such a reality over an untruth; for our intimacy looked compromising enough to satisfy all the hungry mouths and cackling tongues."

"And that other woman?" Nora asked falteringly. "What of her?"

"I know nothing more of her. I hope never to see her again," Madge answered, with renewed bitterness. "She has brought all this trouble on me."

"But she was not to know that," Nora said, in pleading tones. "And you yourself sought the interview — it was not her wish — you pressed it on her ——"

"And how do you know that I myself sought the interview?" Madge Carson asked.

"You told me so," Nora said; "and it was not likely that she would have been very friendly. She would not have been at her best. How could she be? You would not have been at your best. And after all, she was in the very net from which you had only just freed yourself. She was probably very unhappy, and full of doubts and misgivings; and probably, as the time went on, she became still more unhappy, and could not, could not free herself from this man's influence — did not know how — did not always want to know

how, for in his own way he loved and needed her; and that made her bondage the greater. Indeed, indeed, you are hard on her—she would not have wished to bring unhappiness on you. If she had known it, she would have come to you long ago, and held out her arms to help and comfort you. There was nothing she would not have done to bring balm to your troubled spirit. She would have ——"

Madge Carson stood up and stiffened herself.

The truth broke in upon her.

"You seem to know a great deal about that other woman," she said, in a low voice.

She stood there, a little, rigid, defiant figure. There seemed to be no compromise about her.

But Nora put her hand fearlessly on Madge's shoulders.

"Don't be hard on that other woman," she said, gently. "She has learnt to love you."

And the next moment they were both seated close together on the sofa, tear-stained hand in tear-stained hand.

CHAPTER VI

COWARDICE

It was about six o'clock of that same evening when Nora, who had not recovered from the shock of hearing Madge Carson's pitiful story, sat in the drawing-room of her home, working at her embroidery on a frame, and occasionally looking up at Theodore Bevan — looking up at him as though she would have given anything in the world to speak out her many tumultuous thoughts. But his presence and individuality always constrained her. He paralysed her tongue as well as her heart and brain. She was afraid of him. And he was particularly charming that night — almost boyishly playful. He had brought another wedding-present, a beautiful little reading-lamp.

"That is what my youngest brother would have given you, if I had ever had one!" he said.

No, she felt she could not speak with him about little Madge Carson that night; perhaps to-morrow — or the next day — some day and some hour when she could conquer her cowardice. She knew it was cowardice. She was ashamed of it. But she could not overcome it.

The bell rang, and a strange thrill passed through her. The door was opened by the servant, and Brian Uppingham came in. He glanced at Nora, at Bevan, at the wedding-gifts on the table. He looked pale, but quietly determined.

"Miss Penhurst," he said, "I think you will not re-

fuse to grant me just two minutes' hearing. No, no, Mr Bevan, I take no orders from you."

Theodore Bevan turned to Nora. His mobile face was distorted with rage and every kind of evil passion. He struck terror into her heart. There was no trace now of that boyish tenderness and simplicity and yearning to be loved. She saw in that moment the outward and visible sign of the real Theodore Bevan — a man cruel and malevolent. But in the next instant he had composed his features.

"Tell him to go," he said, huskily, to Nora; "tell him to go."

But Nora had gathered together some of her old independence and spirit.

"No," she cried. "Mr Uppingham shall stay and speak his mind."

At her words a glow of tenderness spread itself over Brian's troubled countenance.

"Ah!" he said, gently, "I have no wish to harass you, and I did not even realise that you would not be alone. But since Mr Bevan is here, I am glad to meet him again, and in your presence. Once before, I met him face to face, and laid hands on him. I dare say you know all about that. Then he sought his revenge on me, to which of course he was entitled. I do not blame him for deciding on that particular kind of revenge which would wound me more than anything else — the loss of your esteem. But he used a poisoned blade. It was only yesterday that I learnt from more sources than one, that he had been maliciously circulating Nurse Isabel's name about with mine. It has been very hard on her, and she has been suffering from poverty and disheartenment. And I have been suffering from the grief of fearing that you believed those evil words of her

and me. So I am here to-day to tell you — in the name of my dear mother who brought me up to safeguard a woman's honour, and not to wreck it — I am here to tell you in her dear name, that Nurse Isabel and I have never been anything except the kindliest comrades; and if Mr Bevan has made you think otherwise — even with a passing shadow of a thought — then, indeed, he has had his full revenge on me. Nothing on earth could have wounded me more. But I have at least the right to tell you that we have been maligned, and you misjudge Nurse Isabel if you believe any of the scandals about her, strewn broadcast by Mr Bevan. It is the very meanest thing for a man to do to a woman, because he knows it to be effectual, even in these so-called advanced days. And now that is all I came to say. I thank you with my whole heart, Miss Penhurst, for hearing me out."

The door closed, and he had gone.

If Theodore Bevan would only have spoken one single indignant word against Brian and his visit; if he had turned on Nora and let loose his anger on her for having dared allow the intruder to linger in the room; if he had shown any sign whatsoever of antagonism or resentment, — Nora's spirit would have broken from its prison-house that night.

But he said nothing at all. He crouched over the fire, shivered, put on a fresh log, shivered again, looked the very picture of illness, childlike helplessness, and loneliness; and his apathy numbed her. She made no comments. She asked no questions. She thought of little Madge Carson and her master bookbinder; of Nurse Isabel and her damaged reputation; of the historian and his dignified denial. And she thought of Theodore Bevan's distorted face. And she too shivered.

But she remained silent.

CHAPTER VII

THE REINSTATEMENT OF NURSE ISABEL

THE great specialist sent for Nurse Isabel, much to her astonishment, for she had regarded his dismissal of her as final. He told her that the reason he had written her on his books again was that he had received a visit from Brian Uppingham, which had greatly impressed him.

"He came to speak up for you," the doctor said, in his practical, rather brusque way. "I was utterly surprised at his coming, because in the reports which reached me, it was his name which was coupled with yours."

"His name coupled with mine?" Nurse Isabel repeated.

"He evidently had no idea of the nature of the report," continued the doctor, glancing at her with his keen eyes. "And he was able to deny it as man to man. Do you mean to say that you also did not know of this? Yet you knew that slurs were being cast on your reputation. I told you so myself, and that I did not care to be bothered with the ins and outs of the matter."

"You never even gave me a chance of denying this or any other slander," Nurse Isabel said. "Oh yes, I knew that unpleasant things were being said against me, but until now it never struck me as possible that Mr Uppingham's name could be dragged in to injure me — and him. He has always been most kind to me, and I should be the last person to wish to wound him. I nursed him for three months. He laughed at my follies

and frivolities and all my professional and human shortcomings, and I often thought him intolerably slow ——"

(The doctor smiled. There was something very quaint in Nurse Isabel's frankness.)

"— and depressing. And when it was all over, and he had gone back to his usual work, I found I was a stronger woman, with a stronger hold on the best things in life. And that is the whole history of it from beginning to end."

The Doctor had risen from his comfortable arm-chair. This great specialist was great enough to be feeling ashamed of himself.

"The fact is, Nurse," he said, furridging amongst his papers, — "the fact is, that in the hurry and scurry after wealth and position, one is liable to think only of one's own self, and of what is conducive to one's own interests and comfort. One has scarcely the time to be human, and never the time to be just. I felt that I had quite enough to do without examining into the pros and cons of your morality. It was far easier to scratch your name off my books. Cowardly of me — and like a man. But I am very sorry. Pray forgive me, and take this case from me. Some day, when I have leisure, I will talk further with you. You women are strange creatures. And look here — when you have done with this particular patient, I shall have plenty of other work for you. And I will see you safely through these troubled waters."

He patted her kindly on the arm, gave her all his instructions, and dismissed her. Meanwhile the electric bell had been sounding incessantly, and the over-heated waiting-room was being filled up with the usual crowd of sufferers — real and imaginary. But when Nurse Isabel had left him, and he had returned to his usual impersonal routine, it was a satisfaction to him to feel

that he had spared the time to be human. It influenced the whole of his morning's work too; and he prescribed easier distances for hopeless cases, and less impossible undertakings for those who were short of time and money. And some people only paid half fees that day, and others paid nothing. But that was not anything unusual in his or any one else's consulting-room. And Nurse Isabel went on her way, torn by many varying emotions, of gratitude, relief, vexation, and distress. She was wounded beyond all words for her historian's sake. That was her first and strongest concern. She thought of his clean life and upright manhood; and with all the real generosity and unselfishness of her nature she was indignant for him. Truly women are curious complicated creatures — such subtle entanglements of heart and head, worldliness and spirituality. She did not say:

"Oh! it does not matter for a man. He can look after himself; a little more or less of that sort of thing makes no difference to him in his social life, and the women think it is smart and suitable."

No, she did not dismiss it like that. She thought of his deep unalterable love for Nora, and that it would wound him cruelly to think that she would have heard this, and perhaps been influenced by that little Bevan to believe it. She saw the whole process clearly: Bevan's revenge on her for her interference between him and Nora in the old days, and his fixed determination to keep her out of Nora's life, because he knew that she read and understood him, and therefore she was dangerous; and Bevan's revenge on Brian Uppingham carried out in this simple but effectual plan of depreciating him in the eyes of the woman whom he loved. It was a capital idea of his, to kill two birds with one stone. It was

true economy of labour. Nurse Isabel pictured to herself the expression on his face when he was evolving this scheme.

"Little contemptible earth-man," she said to herself as she went along. "If I only could see him, I'd like to horsewhip him."

Engrossed with these thoughts, she passed into a restaurant in Oxford Street. She made up her mind to take a good lunch in celebration of her reinstatement, and then, before entering on her new professional duties in the evening, to hurry off to see Nora Penhurst. She settled herself down at the only table where there was a vacancy. There was a man buried in a newspaper, but she did not even glance at him. She studied the menu, and ordered her lunch with her usual air of a princess *incognita* — what an admirable and helpful attribute in this snobbish old world! — and then the man emerged from the newspaper. It was Theodore Bevan. There they sat, side by side, those two, and never spoke. A less worldly woman than Nurse Isabel would perhaps have spoken. Her rage and indignation would have got the mastery over her discretion. But she knew better. He might have charged her with annoying him. As a matter of fact, directly he recognised her, he made up his mind that if she addressed him, he would have her removed and thus disgrace her. But she was discreetly silent and self-contained, and contented herself with glancing at him and wondering more than ever what Nora could have found in him to admire. And then she thought of Brian. And it was for this little worm that the historian had been put on one side. It was scarcely credible. And it was this little worm who had been deliberately injuring her own good name, and burrowing where no one might see him at work. Nurse

Isabel nearly had a seizure from suppressed rage, but she did not give in; she sat there and ate her lunch, ordered her coffee, sipped it leisurely, paid her bill with graceful condescension, put on her gloves in a sort of poetical reverie, and finally went on her way.

"Little beast!" she thought. "At least he cannot think that his presence embarrassed me."

She had no idea that it was her presence which embarrassed him; for he was himself full of unrest. He had lost or mislaid his journal, that record of his thoughts meant for no eyes except his. He had been feeling overwrought these last few days, and at times strangely absent-minded. Was it possible that he had strapped it up with the volumes which he had sent back to the library, or had he perhaps included it in the box of second-hand books despatched that day to a Working Men's Club in the North? Oh, perhaps, after all, it was reposing in some safe corner in his room: still, he had looked for it until he was dazed. What books had he taken to Nora last evening? Was it possible ——? A horrible fear came into his mind, and then he dismissed it, and remembered with relief that he had tied together an *édition de luxe* of 'Omar Khayyàm' and Shelley, taken them to Nora's home, and placed them on the table where his other wedding-presents were kept. Brian Uppingham's sudden appearance on the scenes had made him forget to give them to her, and had indeed upset all his quiet calculations. He had hoped that none of his plans and methods would have revealed themselves until after his marriage with Nora. After marriage nothing mattered. When he had once got her safely under his roof as his wife, he would allow none of these ups and downs, these varying moods, — these periods of doubt and belief. There should be an

unbroken submission. He had made up his mind about that. And whenever he thought of it his face grew harder and more determined. If Nora could have seen him thus, what would she have thought? But she had had a glimpse of his real nature as expressed on his countenance; and the consciousness of that added to his mental uneasiness. And now that detestable woman Nurse Isabel cropped up from nowhere to accentuate his fears. Supposing that she, as well as the historian, took it into her head to go straight to Nora? But perhaps the report had not yet reached her — for probably Uppingham had not told her. And reports generally reached last of all the very people against whom they were levelled. He became more uneasy. Supposing she was on her way even now? Theodore Bevan hurriedly paid his bill and followed her. Yes, he saw her get into an omnibus which would land her near Nora's home. Of course she might not be going there — but there was the chance. He took a hansom, and of course arrived first. The servant told him that Nora was out, but he passed into the drawing-room. The servant disliked him, but she could not help noticing how ill he looked.

"At least I shall be here to prevent my Athene from seeing that odious woman, if she does come," he thought.

He went straight to the table where Nora kept some of her wedding gifts, and there to his unutterable relief he found the *édition de luxe* of 'Omar Khayyâm' tied up with a handsome volume of Shelley, and with nothing else. That was his own especial knot, and the parcel had been put on one side and forgotten. Then the journal had either gone to the North, or else was waiting with the six library books in his offices in the

City. He knew it was not likely that he would have made such a terrible mistake, but even the coolest heads blundered sometimes, and for the moment he had been anxious. Ah, that journal! How many profitable hours he had spent over it! How he had loved it, and lingered over it! It was intolerable that he should have misplaced it. More than once he determined to hurry away and renew his searches for it, but his dogged persistence deterred him from leaving Nora's home. So he waited.

Now it so happened that Roger Penhurst got into the same omnibus with Nurse Isabel, and they came together. She had not seen him for some time, and the change in his appearance shocked her. Still, the old geniality was there, though modified by sadness.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, as she gave him a help out of the omnibus. "I feel about a hundred and three to-day, but not too old not to feel considerably younger when a charming damsel like yourself deigns to smile on my unworthy and prehistoric self."

She told him about Brian and herself and the doctor, and that she owed it both to herself and the historian to see Nora personally. Roger knew that she had called at the house several times, and that Nora had made excuses about seeing her, and finally had asked her not to come.

"But you shall see her this time, my dear," the old man said. "We will go straight up to my study, and when she comes in I will send for her. Not that it will do any good. That Bevan fellow has completely changed her. And to think that in six weeks from to-morrow she marries him."

He stopped in the middle of the pavement and tapped the ground with his stick.

"That is the day I think I am going to die," he said. And then he added, with pathetic humour, "But of course I shall not. Things don't fit in like that in life. And I shall probably live for ages yet, and take up Sanskrit, and learn to bicycle. In fact, my dear, I have ordered the bicycle. And I had my first lesson this morning!"

When they reached his home, he told the servant to send Nora up to his study when she came in, and merely to say that he wished to see her at once.

"Mr Bevan is waiting in the drawing-room," the servant said.

"Ah," said Roger, "be sure and send Miss Nora direct to me. Mr Bevan can continue to wait."

Then Nurse Isabel and Roger went upstairs, and the kind old man signed to her to take his easy-chair. There was an air of desolation about the room, which seemed to correspond with the vague sort of desolation encompassing Nora's old father. There were little signs of neglect which only a woman would notice. The plants were dead in the pots. One or two of the pictures were awry. The 'Dreshout Shakspeare' had broken its string and fallen down.

"I don't spend much of my time here now," the old man said, following Nurse Isabel's glance round the room, which had once been such a happy sanctum to him. "It does not look lived in, does it?"

"No," said Isabel, gently, and she picked up the picture, and began re-tying the cord.

"You see," he continued, more to himself than her, "the whole thing has ploughed into me terribly—terribly."

Nurse Isabel nodded her head sympathetically. She felt that any comment from her would seem like an intrusion on his grief.

"But I don't blame her, poor child," he said, tenderly. "Life is a very difficult language, and there are not many of us who can write even one sentence of it without a serious blunder. And no one shall dare to blame her, if I don't. I am quite determined about that."

He had been leaning back, looking intensely fatigued. But he straightened himself as he spoke those last words. Then, without any warning, he sank back and fainted. Nurse Isabel was astir at once, doing all she could for him; but he did not show any signs of returning to consciousness, and she was just becoming thoroughly alarmed at his condition, when the door opened softly, and Nora came in. She was almost as ashen as her father lying so still on the couch.

"Oh, father, father," she cried passionately, kneeling beside him. She kissed his dear hands — covered them with kisses. She kissed his grand old brow; all the old endearing names, which he had so loved, leaped from her in a very torrent of love and tenderness.

"Oh, my old father, my old father," she cried, "what have I been doing to you all these months — what have I been thinking of? Open your dear eyes — speak to me — listen to me. I see it all clearly, clearly now. Oh, my darling old father-friend — always so good to me, so gentle, so genial, so undemanding — my darling old chum and playmate — no one on earth like you — never has been — never will be again — and I to have so wounded and neglected you and pushed you on one side, and darkened your bright spirit. But it is all over, my old sweetheart of a father — and the scales have fallen from my eyes. . . ."

And then, with a deep sigh of returning consciousness, Roger Penhurst opened his eyes.

"Why, God bless my soul!" he said, dreamily.

The two women bent eagerly over him.

"My Nora," he said, gradually coming to — "and that other villain, Nurse Isabel. Ah yes, I remember now. No, I don't, but . . ."

Then there came a pause and a relapse into lethargy. And then:

"Surely, surely," he murmured, "I heard something about an old sweetheart of a father — or was I dreaming that my dear girl spoke so lovingly to me — just like her old young self?"

They helped him to raise himself, and he leaned his head on Nora's shoulder.

"My old, old sweetheart of a father," Nora whispered, "it is I who have been dreaming all this time, but now I am awake."

He made no answer, asked no questions, but lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it silently. The old man knew that he had found his belovèd daughter again.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NET IS BROKEN

Nora had been stirred to the depths of her being by Madge Carson's account of Theodore Bevan's influence, and of the cruel way in which he had set to work to punish the little bookbinder for having warned her. He had hit on the best device, for he had broken her heart and spirit. Nothing but intimidation had prevented Nora from taxing him with it that same evening. She went to bed ashamed of her cowardice, shocked by this discovery of Theodore Bevan's contemptible meanness, and curiously thrilled by the unexpected appearance of Brian Uppingham. She saw him standing there now, denying in Bevan's very face the truth of these libels concerning himself and Nurse Isabel, so ingeniously circulated by his successful rival. Had she herself really believed them? When she saw the historian and heard his voice again, her heart yearned to him, and she knew, as indeed she had known all along — if, poor girl, she could only have allowed herself the benefit of the knowledge — that there could never have been a doubt about his unalterable loyalty to her — that it was foreign to his nature to be toying and tampering with one woman and offering a soiled love to another woman. During that long night in the silence of her bedroom, Nora strove with herself for her own freedom, as we all must. And when the grey dawn came, she was still a bondswoman, even though she had seen herself face to face: seen her

folly, realised her weakness, her cowardice, her selfishness. Yes, she understood the whole history of it now; she saw how she had wronged Brian and wronged Nurse Isabel; she saw how she had neglected her old father and broken his heart — dimmed his bright spirit — bitterly, bitterly she reproached herself for that. She saw how she had turned from her old friends, given up every one and everything, lost her enthusiasms, her honest belief in people and things, and in the value and beauty of life, lost even her simple, unsectarian confidence in God, the Great Mystery of whom one may assuredly catch a golden glimpse through any one of the creaks of creed — or all of them — or somehow, — no matter how. But even this had slipped from her. It had gone with all the rest. And for what, for whom? And then all her doubts and misgivings of these last two years ranged themselves before her mind's eye in a formidable phalanx, and were reinforced by little Madge Carson's experience, and by the discovery of Theodore Bevan's contemptible slandering. She had always known that he was not this or that, that or this, great or gallant, expansive, noble; but she had ever believed him to be just and singularly free from malice. And now, if that belief were shaken, what remained? Oh, she must free herself from him, she must summon up the resolution to shake him off and be done with him for ever — it was not too late — other women had done it at the eleventh hour: other women had gathered themselves together, and why not she? She would no longer suffer this evil influence in her life. Ah, all along she had known it to be evil. Ever since he had found her at the Castle, she knew that the good in her had been struggling with the evil, and the evil had conquered.

Education, environment, temperament, her own pride, her own self-respect — nothing had sufficed to save her from the primeval struggle between good and ill — and nothing had helped her. She had been as weaponless as any girl in the street. And she had fallen like any girl in the street. Oh, perhaps not in the same way, but there was the debasement of spirit, and the cancer in the heart, and the bitterness of defeat, and the sickening sense of mental servitude. It was past all bearing. No, no! She would not stand it one moment longer. To-morrow she would be done with him for ever. She would harden herself against him. She would remember that evil look on his face. She would try to forget that he needed her, and that she was all his life to him — all he had, and all he cared for. . . . And yet how could she forsake him? Had he not told her time after time that the day when she turned from him would be his last day on earth? . . . And how could she bring herself to do it? . . . And yet, what right had he to bind her thus? Only a coward would tell a woman that. . . . But then he was not like other men, and his life had been desolate, and his character misunderstood, and his nature warped. . . . And perhaps, nay, surely, he was not to be judged in exactly the same way as any one else. And perhaps Madge Carson in the bitterness of her heart had exaggerated — and yet. . . .

So when the grey dawn came, her spirit was still at war within her. She rose from her bed, put on her dressing-gown, and paced her room. Her beautiful fair hair fell over her face and throat. She seemed like poor distraught Ophelia, for whom life had been too much.

"Is there nothing to help me?" she said, wringing her hands.

She crept downstairs, and stood outside her father's

bedroom. She put her cheek against the door, leaning almost as a suppliant.

"Father," she cried, "if I could only break these bonds!"

She passed into his study, where she had spent so little time lately. She touched his things — his books and papers, his Sanskrit grammar, his spectacles, his almanac. She looked at the quotation for the day. It was from Shakespeare:

"Lift up thy brow and with a great heart heave away this storm."

She stood thinking: "Is that an omen?" But there was no hope in her heart with which to take the omen.

Then, like some restless spirit, she went downstairs into the drawing-room and paced about there, wrestling with her foe, conquering, being conquered, and becoming faint with the contest. She turned to the table where she kept the wedding-presents which Theodore Bevan had given her. Her eyes filled with tears as she glanced at them, all so carefully chosen to suit her taste in every way.

"He loves me," she said. "He has meant well by me. Even his injustice and unkindness to others have been the outcome of his love for me."

She handled the gifts, the books, the miniatures, the reading-lamp. The tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Suddenly she saw a packet of books addressed to her. She remembered that Theodore Bevan had brought it on the previous evening, and they had both forgotten it, owing to the mental disturbance caused by the historian's arrival. Nora now unfastened it; and, to her surprise, the package contained an *inner packet* of two books done up together in Theodore Bevan's precise way and addressed to her, — also a Mudie book and

another book — this last one with an unlocked clasp. She held the inner packet in her hands, but did not open it. She glanced at the Mudie book. It was a volume of Asiatic travels which he had particularly recommended to her. The other book — was . . . She turned it over and looked inside. The pages were closely covered with Theodore Bevan's miniature handwriting. . . . What could it be? What could it contain? Was it an outpouring of his love — something he had written about her? He was always saying that he was always writing about her, — and now he wanted her to see it. . . . Ah, if it was that, it would be better for her not to look. It would make the task of dismissing him greater and bitterer. . . . She put the book on the table, and turned away. But the temptation was too great. She took hold of it feverishly, stood undecided for a moment, and then opened it again. She stared at the pages. Her face became rigid as she read. She was reading his journal. . . .

Long after she had dropped the book from her hands, she sat as one paralysed. . . .

Before any one stirred in the house, she went straight off to Madge Carson. She had told her everything the previous evening, and Madge had begged her to throw up her engagement before it was too late. Now there was no need for Madge to entreat, but in Nora's bitter humiliation and mortification she sought and found solace from one who had been humiliated by the same man. She stayed with Madge until late in the afternoon, and when she left, she made a solemn promise that she would not delay another single day before ridding herself of Theodore Bevan.

"Be of good courage," Madge had said; "you can do it."

Then Nora had come home and had met the servant, who told her that her father was lying unconscious. Then she had bent over him, and poured out her heart in grief and love. And now she and Nurse Isabel were keeping watch in his bedroom, relieved to see him sleeping so quietly, and with a happy smile on his face. There had been no time for any explanation or astonishment between these two women, who had not met for many months: for where illness and anxiety are concerned, any one who helps is taken for granted. But now they looked at each other, and Nora's pale face flushed with shame.

"Nurse Isabel," she said, in a whisper, "I know how badly I behaved to you. I feel quite broken-hearted about everything. I blame no one but myself. I ought to have understood better, and seen more clearly. I don't think any one was ever so wretched as I am, and I feel torn in pieces. And you've been so good to me. If you did what I deserved, you ought to turn from me: instead of which, here you are, just as kind and friendly as at the very beginning, although you know what I have been thinking of you, and what I have been saying too."

Nurse Isabel glanced at the old man, and then signed to Nora to follow her out of the room; and they stood together in his study.

"Look here, Miss Penhurst," she said, brusquely, "you have wounded me, and it is no use pretending you haven't. I never did any harm to you. But you have done a great deal of harm to me, and in more ways than you know."

She stopped suddenly, and when she spoke again her voice had changed.

"My poor dear girl," she said, as she put both her hands on Nora's. "This is not the time for scolding you. And indeed I did not come to say disagreeable

things. I only came to tell you that you were never to believe a single word against Brian Uppingham; that you were always to believe that he is the soul of honour, without any thoughts of love in his pure heart except for you: that nothing and no one could ever change him; and that those who love him best would never wish him to change — would even feel that they had lost an ideal in life if he could change. I came to plead with you for his love and loyalty, Miss Penhurst. You may think what you like of me in other ways, but you must never believe that there was any truth in these malicious reports set on foot by Theodore Bevan."

There was a very gentle and beautiful smile of protecting love on Nurse Isabel's face. It spiritualised her whole presence. Nora saw it, and forgot all her own troubles.

"Nurse Isabel," she said, with sudden comprehension, "you love him yourself! And yet you would not have him falter one hair's-breadth away from me — me, so unworthy of his loyalty and love, and so unworthy of your kindness and forgiveness?"

"Not one hair's-breadth," Nurse Isabel said, gently. "For the wind bloweth where it listeth, and you know the historian loved you from the beginning. When you came into his life, he sprang up to greet you. He had been waiting for you as he is waiting now . . . and for no one else. . . ."

Nora shook her head.

"No, no," she said, "you must not say that."

"This shadow on your soul will pass," Nurse Isabel continued, as though she had not heard. "You will look up again and see the sunlight. And I for one will be glad, for his sake — and yours. And then there is your old father sleeping so peacefully in the next room. You know how glad he will be. It will mean new life to

him, and before it is too late. And then there are all your friends who cling to you and believe in you — and I still wish to be one of them — they will be very glad. And Theodore Bevan — "

She left off, and even in the midst of her earnestness, a twinkle came into her eye, and a smile of mischief played about her mouth.

"Good gracious!" she said, "we've forgotten all about him. He is downstairs in the drawing-room. He came in just before your father and myself."

Nora leaned against the bookcase and looked deadly pale. She knew that her moment had come. It must not be to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the next: it must be now. She went into her bedroom, and fetched the journal; and when she returned she said tremblingly:

"Nurse Isabel, would you go down and make sure he is there? I don't think I could string myself up unless I knew for certain."

Nurse Isabel asked no questions, and, nothing reluctant, went downstairs, and very slowly opened the drawing-room door.

"At last you have come, my Athene," Theodore Bevan's voice said.

Nurse Isabel smile delightedly. She lit a match, for there was no lamp, and the fire was low.

"It is not your Athene, you see," she said. "Ah, don't alarm yourself about me. I have not come to take you to task about all the malicious lies you've been telling of me. I have only come to say that Miss Penhurst will be down at once. Her father has been ill. We knew you were here, but in the hurry and anxiety you were forgotten. So now good evening. I am going up to watch by Mr Penhurst's bedside. Thank you, there is no danger, but still a nurse in the house is always

useful on these occasions. And I happened to have planned my visit for the right time. Dear me! It strikes cold in this room. Pray make yourself quite at home, and put some more coals on the fire. What a capital restaurant that was!"

She slipped out of the room, and told Nora that Bevan was there.

Then Nora went down. She looked miserable, but there was a certain dignity and resolution about her which had not been present for many months. Her beautiful hair, once so resplendent, had lost its glow and vitality. Her face had thinned down, and wore an expression of perpetual strain. She did not look like a ship in full sail now. She looked as though she had been storm-driven, dismantled, disabled, and yet with one supreme effort was at last making her way towards the harbour. Only for one moment she paused, with her hand on the latch of the door. In the other hand she held the journal. Then she went in. Theodore Bevan was standing in front of the fire, supporting his chin with both his hands. He seemed lost in thought. He did not move his position when Nora entered.

"Here is your journal," Nora said, quietly, stretching out the lost volume.

He started.

"Yes," she went on, deliberately, "this record of your thoughts and plans intended only for your eyes. Here it is — and I have read it."

He made no comment.

"But even if I had not read it," she continued, gathering in strength, "I should have freed myself from you this very day."

He remained silent.

"But, having read it, my eyes have grown still clearer,

and everything from the beginning of our acquaintance up to this very day stands revealed to me, and by you.

"Oh," she said, with sudden excitement, "you may think to intimidate me by standing there speechless as you have so often done — but that has passed, Theodore Bevan, that has passed — and I have shaken you off — and I have no fears of you now, and no feelings about you except the most withering contempt for you, and even more contempt for myself for ever having suffered myself to be held in bondage by such a thing as you. Good God! And I've cheated myself into believing you just and generous-minded, and free from malice and uncharitableness. Hundreds of times I have said to myself: 'He is not this or that, but he is just.' And I have always admired that more passionately than anything else, and therefore I've clung to it in you. Through all my misgivings about you, I've clung to that belief — for I doubted you from the very outset, as you know, and in my heart of hearts I knew you were an evil influence. The good and evil in me has been incessantly at strife ever since I first saw you — and the evil conquered. Oh, you know what you have done to me — your journal tells me that you have carried out what you intended, — you have taken a human soul and played with it, touched it with your poison, watched it slowly corrode, and revelled in your work. What a mind — what a nature! And that is the mind and the nature which has been mastering me. But I am free at last. . . ."

She gave a great sigh as though she were taking a long breath. She stretched her arms out as though to feel an infinite space. And still he stood there, his head slightly bowed, and no single word passing his lips.

"A few weeks more," she went on, hurriedly, "and it

would have been too late. But you see, I have been nursing little Madge Carson, and I have learnt the whole truth from her — the whole truth about what you did to revenge yourself on her for having warned me against you. She did not even succeed in her attempt, yet you set yourself to punish her, in a very simple but effectual way. I cannot find words to tell you what I think of your malicious meanness in taking hold of a woman's good name and slandering it deliberately for your own purposes. That alone would pronounce you to be beneath even the consideration of contempt. Bad men are bad enough in all conscience, but I believe that the worst of them would pause at that. . . . But you did not hesitate. Madge Carson was to be punished in the way which would wound her most. Nurse Isabel was to be slandered and deprived of work; and the journal tells how you reckoned on her naturally frivolous character to aid you in your undertaking. Brian Uppingham was to be punished for having shaken you like a rat — a rat, and whilst you posed to me as being magnanimous and forgiving, and I believed you — poor fool I! — all the time you were devising his penalty. And when you hit upon it, you laughed in triumph. The journal says so:

"'I laughed in triumph. For this was an inspiration.' You see I have studied your journal well. Ah, I dare say you wonder how it came into my possession. You brought it yourself. You yourself put it amongst my wedding-presents with those other books — "

He started. Yes, he remembered now the mistake he had made. He bit his lips, but gave no other sign of discomfiture.

"And I thank you for your choicest wedding-present," she continued. "I don't know why you brought it, but I only know that I found it whilst I was hardening

myself to speak to you to-day — and I opened it, thinking it was a gift from you, and I saw your writing, and thought it was some personal outpouring which would make my task of dismissing you heavier — for you had worked on my feelings and made me believe that you needed me, that I was your very soul's necessity — and I paused. . . . But the temptation was too great, and I read. I know well enough that it was a dishonourable thing to do, that I ought to have thrown it on one side, but I could not resist, did not wish to resist: for there was the whole story of my bondage to you, the whole project revealed, and all the details of fulfilment commented on. Oh, I have no regrets and no shame about that yet — the time will come, I suppose, when I shall feel ashamed. Let it come. It will work in with all the degradation of this most miserable period of my life, when I followed the voice of evil rather than of good, and turned aside from all who loved me and believed in me for you — *an evil spirit.* For make no mistake about that, Theodore Bevan: in my heart of hearts I have never believed you anything else except an evil spirit. You have rankled in my soul, as all evil things must of necessity. I blame myself bitterly that I did not cut you out at the very beginning. But you interested me; you amused me; you were so different from every one else, that I thought it would be a new experience to have some one like you in my life — some one whom all other people detested — and so I played with you. No one could ever condemn me more harshly than I condemn myself. I despise myself more even than I despise you. And you know now what I think of you, therefore you may judge what I think of myself. But in spite of you and in spite of myself, yes, in spite of this two years' misery, I shall recover my pride, my independence of

spirit, my liberty of mind, my joy in life — all this shall come back to me, and in full measure. I will fight for it as no one has ever fought before.

"And now, go.

"If you had wished to say anything, you would have broken in upon me before this. Therefore, go —"

At last Theodore Bevan raised his head.

"The little good that was developing in me," he said, in a low voice, "you originated in me. You have read the journal. The journal tells you that. This day you have yourself uprooted that germ of good. With you to help me, who knows what I might not have become? As it is, you have forsaken me, and on you lies the responsibility of my soul and my life."

Then he went dreamily towards the door, and there he turned.

"I always told you that the day when you forsook me would be my last day on earth . . . and I am a man of my word . . . as the journal has shown you. Nevertheless, I thank you for what you began to do in me —"

And he left her.

Part IV

CHAPTER I

THE SELLING OF THE PUNCHBOWL

"WELL, I never!" said Mrs Mary Shaw, putting down her bread-tins, which she had just been buttering. "A letter for me, and from one of them foreign outlandish places! I never did hold with people going and hiding theirselves in them distant spots. All the folk as I ever knew doing that came to no good — and small wonder too! Not that I did know any one as went and did it, — except my poor husband — bless him! But he were quite enough to convince me — poor soul! He wrote to me from across the seas, and I do declare this letter, coming as it were from nowhere, puts me in a sort of tremble. Ah, deary me! That was a beautiful letter he sent me some fourteen years agone — and he signed it 'Ever your miserable Jim without you.'"

"He seemed to prosper uncommon well without you," snarled Great-great-aunt Rebeccah Renaldson.

"That were his way, poor creature!" said Mrs Mary. "People can't be broke of their ways." And she added, in an undertone, "No one has ever broke you of your tongue. There you've got it safe and sound at ninety-six year old."

"And she'll have it for another ninety-six year," said Mr Parrington, who had just then come into the kitchen. "What's this I hear about a letter from foreign parts?"

"Now look here, Mr William Parrington," said Mrs

Mary, severely, "I can't have you a-poking and a-prying into my private correspondence. Letters is secret property, and I'll trouble you to mind your own business."

"That's just what I've come to do," returned Parrington, amiably. "I've come to sit in my favourite armchair and mind the business."

"Oh, really," said Mrs Mary Shaw. "Much obliged, I'm sure! But you're forgetting yourself, Parrington. It ain't your business. It is my business."

"As you like, my dear," he replied. "I'll sit here and look after our business."

"Our business!" she cried. "Was there ever such a man? Well, since you are here, you may serve out the beer, and give liberal measure to every one except Timothy Evans, who can't stand the tiniest extra drop. For I've got a letter from dear Miss Nora; and the King's Head is proud to be a little generous on joyful occasions. Of course, at the Punchbowl it be different altogether: people do say trade is awful bad there. There's no denying it be a trim little building, but folk don't as a rule call in to drink the building. It's the beer they're after!"

She then fled into the parlor and read her letter from Nora. Nora wrote from some place in Lower California. This was part of the letter:

"I dare say father told you that Mrs Ellerton invited me to come out and join her here — you remember Mrs Ellerton —?"

"Ay, that I do, dear Miss Nora," put in Mrs Shaw, as comment.

"I was very glad to come, for I was wanting a change, and you would be amused to see how busy I always am. Out in this life, one has to do most of the housework oneself, and I have not had much time to feel

even homesick. Now I can understand why poor people who are always overworked are much more cheerful than leisured individuals who do not have to put their hands to uncongenial tasks. And I think of you — how cheerful and bright you always are ——"

"Ah, but my dear Miss Nora, I have my bad times under the apron, you know," said Mrs Mary Shaw, shaking her head sadly. "And as for being cheerful, that's what you might call natural-like. There aren't no virtue in being light-hearted when you weren't born heavy-hearted! Now, when Aunt Rebeccah Renaldson behave herself, I call that wonderful virtuous; for she wasn't born pleasant — poor creature!"

"Already I feel better than I have been for months," the letter continued. "And sometimes I can't help laughing heartily over our misadventures and experiences. A week ago I nearly sat down on a rattlesnake. Think of that, Mrs Mary! The other day when I was in the dumps, and was moping on the verandah, Mrs Ellerton came to say that the larder was invaded by red ants. Another time when I was feeling horribly depressed, Mr Ellerton rushed in to say that all the horses had got loose, and were tearing over the ranch, and trampling down the trees. Another time, the reservoir burst. And so on. But I will tell you all about my life out here when I return. If you have not already married Mr Parrington, I still hope to be present at the ceremony, for I shall be at home in a few months now. I trust you are being kind to poor Parrington, and not overtaxing his patience. I so often think of the happy times I have spent at Graystoke, and of all the fun we have had over Mr Parrington."

"Ay, that we have!" said Mrs Mary Shaw, smiling. "And as for marrying him, dear Miss Nora, I shouldn't

think of doing such a thing until you return. And I'll go and tell him now — the tiresome man!"

So she went back to the kitchen, and found Parrington installed there.

"You seem to be making yourself pretty much at home," she said.

"I'm just getting my hand in, my dear," said Parrington, benignly. "Lots of things want seeing to in this shanty. When I come and live here, things will be very different."

"*When you come and live here*," repeated Mrs Mary Shaw, slowly.

"Well, my dear, we've got to live somewhere, I suppose," said Parrington. "And I've understood you to say wild horses wouldn't drag you to the poor little Punchbowl."

"And you said nothing on earth would make you live in the King's Head," replied Mrs Mary Shaw, toying with the flour-scoop.

"Did I, Mrs Mary? Well, I've changed my mind. Some one has got to give in. And with alterations, I begin to think — "

"No, no, there mustn't be no alterations!" put in Mrs Mary.

"All right, my dear, there shan't be no alterations," said Parrington.

But Mrs Mary, nothing mollified, continued sternly:

"I can't have you coming and living at the King's Head if you — "

"If," repeated Parrington. "There ain't no 'if' about it. If I don't come to you, where do I go? What's to become of me? *I've sold the Punchbowl.* I must live somewhere," he added, plaintively. "And very soon poor Parrington won't have no home — at his time of

life too — fifty year old and bald — and no home! Think of it!"

"Sold the Punchbowl!" cried Mrs Shaw, delightedly, and she gave Mr Parrington a hearty kiss on his cheek.

"There, Parrington," she cried. "That's for you. And I don't care as who sees it."

"Ah, she be aging wonderful quick," muttered Aunt Rebeccah Renaldson. "I notice a deal of difference in Mrs Mary Shaw these last four year."

"Never you mind what the old cuss says," returned Parrington, in a comforting tone of voice. "Perhaps the time will come when she'll be aging wonderful quick."

"No, Parrington," said Mrs Mary, suddenly taking up the cudgels for her ancestors. "That time will never come. Don't you be a-reckoning on that. The ancestors will always be here as long as you and me. It may be fifty year, and it may be a hundred. And if you come and marry me and live in my King's Head, you'll have to put up with my great-great-aunt, and my great-uncle, and my father, and my son — all my ancestors as ever was. So there!"

"Wullie ain't your ancestor," said Parrington, grinning. "And that reminds me, my dear, we must give Wullie a good chance, and 'prentice him to that architect-fellow in Langton."

"And I tell you, Parrington, you're not coming here to turn things topsy-turvy, and send my poor Wullie out into the cruel world," said Mrs Mary a little tearfully.

Parrington smiled at his wayward sweetheart.

"And oh, Parrington," she said, still more tearfully, "you won't be unkind to them poor old ancestors of mine, poor, dear creatures, innocent, patient old things as never harmed no one. They've always done what

they wanted — bless them! — and nobody shan't interfere with them now. Promise me, Parrington, you won't be unkind to them. Oh, I be terrible frightened, and I wish I was dead. I do indeed. How I do wish you hadn't sold the Punchbowl — such a nice little place too, and just the very spot for you."

"Ah, it be too late now," said Parrington, lighting his pipe. "What's done can't be undone."

"I suppose it can't," replied Mrs Mary. "I wish it could. Oh, dear, to think of a strange man living in my King's Head!"

"And you won't be a-changing the whisky and bottled-ale brand, will you?" she added, after a pause. "I know you will — but promise!"

"I promise," said Parrington, with a twinkle in his eye.

"And you'll promise not to marry me till dear Miss Nora comes?" said Mrs Mary.

"I promise," said Parrington.

"And I think that's about all," she said, smiling.

"There's a good deal of promising going on here," said David the blacksmith, who had just come into the bar. "A glass of bitters, please, Mrs Shaw."

"Ah," said Parrington, "'tis a very peaceful occupation to sit in an easy-chair and smoke your pipe and promise!"

"Don't take no notice of what he says, Mrs Mary," said David. "You'll be able to hold your own with the likes of Parrington any day. Ah, Parrington be a lucky fellow! And here be I, as know'd you since we could toddle together, broken-hearted and miserable, and going quickly into the consumptions."

"Get along!" laughed Mrs Mary Shaw, looking at David's strong frame. "Oh, I must tell you, Davy,

I've a letter from dear Miss Nora in foreign parts. And a queer sort of place she's got to. Red ants and rattly-snakes in the larder! Did you ever hear the like? Now, if she'd said blackbeetles, I could understand. And she says she feel a deal better for the change. She don't speak of the little viper gentleman, and it's to be hoped she's forgot all about him. Poor dear girl! Red ants and rattly-snakes! However, they seem to do her good. I'm sure I don't know how, for beetles never do me no good. But lor'! it don' tmatter how folk get better, so long as they do get better. And we've all got our own ways, and can't be broke of 'em. That's what I be always saying."

"Has it ever struck you, my dear," said Parrington, "that I too have got my own ways and can't be broke of 'em?"

Mrs Mary Shaw stood still one moment, and then said:

"Oh, Parrington, why did you go and sell that sweet little Punchbowl? It were the very place for an elderly gentleman to live quietly all by hisself!"

CHAPTER II

A LETTER FROM HOME

"My beloved Nora, — It is now three months since you left us, and although I miss you sorely, my own dear girl, I never cease to rejoice that we were all sensible enough to recognise that nothing except emotional change of a most thorough kind would ever set you on your legs again, and at the same time screw your dear head firmly on your shoulders once more. Emotional change has always seemed to me the only sensible prescription invented by erring physician. I remember years ago, long before you were born, going to a doctor with a long list of ailments, and expecting, of course, a long list of medicines. He took his prescription-book, and then glanced at me very kindly.

"'I could not afford to give this prescription to every one,' he said, in a reluctant sort of way, 'but I will give it to you.'

"Then he wrote it, and put it in an envelope. When I looked at it, all I saw were the words, 'Emotional change — to be taken at once, and kept on continuously for several months.' And he was right.

"You see, Nora, my girl, if you had stayed at home, you would, after the first excitement and effort of giving Mr Bevan up, have relapsed into depression, and tortured yourself into a fever about your responsibility over his death. I do not believe that he has committed suicide. I believe that he is very much alive somewhere, and that with his characteristic quiet cunning he arranged

that report, in order to make all of us miserable — especially yourself, of course — and leave us in the wrong. We shall see: and meanwhile, I am glad to think that even with this burden on your mind, and in spite of the sadness and mistakes of these last three years, you are beginning to take up your life again, and find it full of interest and promise. You could not do otherwise. At twenty-seven you have the world before you and everything on your side: love, friendship, abilities, and good health. But, as old Spenser says, 'It is the mynd that maketh good or ill.' And I see, with tears of gratitude in my eyes, that your dear spirit is healing itself. Yesterday I dipped into Clough's poems, and when I read these words, I thought of you:

> "'With silent woods and hills untenanted
> Let me go commune; under thy sweet gloom,
> Oh, kind maternal Darkness, hide my head.
> The day may come I yet may reassume
> My place, and these tired limbs recruited, seek
> The task for which I now am all too weak.'

I wrote in pencil in the corner, 'My Nora.'

"To my mind nothing could have been more opportune than Mrs Ellerton's suggestion that you should go out and join her in her rough new life. Your accounts of your everyday life amuse me immensely. I would give anything to see both you modern young women, followers of Ibsen and Maeterlinck and other mysterious prophets, doing battle with rattlesnakes, tarantula spiders, Chinamen, and red ants. I am inclined to think that a sort of foreign mission should at once be started in aid of modern young women of hyper-morbid tendencies. They would all come back in the best of health and spirits, having quite forgotten how to be unnecessarily miserable. Ah well! I have

no intention of criticising the ladies only, for I notice numberless modern young gentlemen of ability who would soon give up being decadent if they only were obliged, even for a short time, to become 'hewers of wood and drawers of water.' They too require a mission to be started on their behalf. As for myself, I am too old to profit by any mission, however admirable. That's the advantage of being old, you see; we are left in peace to work out our lifelong mistakes. And one of my many mistakes was the way I behaved over the Bevan affair. If I could have been different, you would have been different, my poor child. No, no, you must not make yourself miserable by heaping reproaches on yourself. It was a difficult time for both of us, and we have come out of it somehow — with all the old affection, and some added. And who can say more than that? Life is full of intricate problems, and I have always thought it hard on youngsters that they are called upon to decide important questions for themselves when they have no knowledge of life, no sense of the true proportion of things, and of course no forethought. So they generally blunder, as we old people have done before them, and they have to spend the rest of their lives in suffering for their mistakes. More misery is brought about by want of judgment than by deliberate sin. And I think that when all our cases are tried in the Great Court — if they ever are tried — there will be some one to plead for us who will say — if we really erred from want of judgment: '*Alas! they did not know, and there was no one at the time who could have made them understand.*'

"So cheer up, my beloved and foolish child; and do not make yourself unhappy about your ancient father. People who love each other, do not have to

forgive each other. And all my grief was healed when I heard you say, — after many months of silence on the subject — 'My old sweetheart of a father.' Then I knew that my wayward vessel was coming into harbour, laden as ever with her golden grain. I do not grudge you your remorse and regret. It is only right that you should have them. Even the most hardened amongst us have them. I sometimes think they are the last lingering bit of divinity in us — left from the wreck. I have moralised a good deal, haven't I? But do not be alarmed about me. I am not ill, and I am not going to become a parson! I am awfully busy with my Sanskrit and my bicycle. I have had several falls, thank you, and succeeded in spraining most of my legs and arms! I enjoy myself deeply. I shall be an expert by the time you come home. We will then make an expedition to Gracechurch and dine at the Three Sadlers; stewed steak and onions, Welsh rarebit, and a good cigar!

"Uppingham is well and busy. You know he insisted on my living with him, and at first I gave in. But I prefer being in mine own inn. However, we are nearly always together, and he is very good to me. You know what he feels about you. But I am under strict orders not to mention his name to you, and so I dare not say more. Nevertheless he waits.

"Don't hurry home, my Nora. Stick to the rattlesnakes until you have got rid of the other poison. I have obeyed your commands, and looked after Miss Madge Carson. She is much better, and the doctors seem to think that no operation will be necessary for her eyes. Her master-bookbinder has sought her out again, and renewed his addresses. But she will have nothing to say to him. And I don't wonder. Mrs Mary Shaw refuses to marry Parrington until you return.

Nurse Isabel has been to see me several times. She is in capital form, and half thinks of accepting an offer of marriage from her present patient, a captain in the Merchant Service. 'However,' she said in her quaint way, 'he may think better of it when he is quite strong again. Man-like, he was terribly afraid that he was going to die, and intensely grateful to me when he did not!'

"How strange! And that same man would have gone down with his vessel without so much as a murmur.

"Well, my dear, God bless you. ROGER."

CHAPTER III

RENEWAL

"My darling old Father, — Your letters cheer and touch me beyond words. I know well how your generous heart forgives me. But I don't forgive myself. And so often I think of how you used to tell me when I was a little girl, that the very last person on earth that one should forgive was one's own self. But I feel wonderfully better already, and this life has done marvels for me. Mrs Ellerton gives me plenty to do, partly on principle, she says, and partly because I can do it so much more easily than she can. She is really very frail. Mr Ellerton already regrets having come out here, and I suppose the end of it will be that we shall all return home together. But I am awfully glad I came here, instead of eating my heart away doing nothing in a hotel on the Continent. Mrs Ellerton is very humorous about her husband's attempts at manual labour.

"'Why, my dear girl,' she says, 'he could not have summoned up the strength to transplant a geranium in England. And now to see him digging up eucalyptus trees nearly makes me hysterical!'

"It is lucky for Mr Ellerton that he has the money to throw away over fads. Many people come out to these regions, and lose all their money and all their courage. And then there is the home-sickness when one knows that one has burnt one's boats. I think that must be something terrible. Mrs Ellerton says that this present departure is not any more expensive than patent medicines purchased on the Continent; and her spirits rise

in proportion as the discomforts of the life make themselves more apparent, for she knows the experiment is approaching its inevitable fulfilment of failure. We have great fun over it all, and as 'Chinaman after Chinaman departs — who hath not lost a Chinaman?' — we turn to, and do the cooking to the best of our abilities and much to Mr Ellerton's disgust. You see he deliberately singled out for his abode the most solitary habitation even in this remote part of the world; and after a few days' sojourn with us, the Chinese servants all discover that they have dying relatives in China, and that they must repair to their native country at once. So they go, and we are left lamenting. Mr Ellerton had an idea that if he could get right away from all human beings and distractions, that he would be able to put his spirit in harmony with that of the universe — whatever that means. We know not whether this mysterious process is really taking place. If it is, I may add that the outward and visible signs of it are extreme irritation over our bad cooking, a good deal of grumbling over his many discomforts, and regrets of and longings for all the joys and advantages of Europe. But we have a fair amount of fun too, and I thoroughly enjoy the riding and driving. It is becoming very hot now, and we take our mattresses into the garden, and sleep out of doors. At first I did not sleep, and was content to lie hour after hour watching the stars, and thinking. You tell me not to fret, dear old father, but I am very downhearted sometimes. I think I should feel quite different if I could know that Theodore Bevan had not killed himself. You have not any idea how my unalterable belief in his suicide weighs me down. He has left me, as I always felt he left me, completely in the wrong. Sometimes I dream that this great load is lifted from my mind, and

then all sorts of beautiful possibilities float in upon my consciousness; and, worked upon, no doubt, by the sweet soft night-air falling so graciously on me, I dream of joyous rides over the far-stretching plains, with no thoughts except a delight in life and nature, and the gratitude of being free — free to ride on and on into the great distances, unhampered by any hauntings of the mind or any weakness of the body. Then I awake, and remember Theodore Bevan, and his last words to me: '*Nevertheless I thank you for what you began to do in me.*' When I am in that mood, the stars look down on me coldly, critically, and a chilliness creeps into my heart. But it is not always so, dear old father-friend. Sometimes the stars and the quietness of the night bring to me ineffable peace, and a sense of newly-acquired and restful strength, and then those words of William Watson come into my mind:

" ' I too have come through wint'ry terrors and cataclysm of soul,
Have come and am deliver'd. Me, the Spring,
Me also, dimly with new life hath touched,
And with regenerate hope, the salt of life;
And I would dedicate these thankful tears
To whatsoever Power beneficent,
Veil'd though his countenance, undivulg'd his thought,
Hath led me from the haunted darkness forth
Into the gracious air and vernal morn' . . .

"So you see, dear, you must think of me as renewing myself, and all the time, in spite of inevitable backslidings, working myself back to a healthy happiness and participation in life, and a gratitude, beyond words, for all your love and tender forgiveness. There never was such a father as yourself; nor such a lovable, gentle-hearted, and original parent. So often, so often I think of your dear quaint ways and sayings; and the tears

come into my eyes. So often I think of the beautiful unworldliness of your spirit. I would have given anything to know you as a young headlong man, though I don't mean to say that you have not always been a headlong father. I don't want to take that away from you, dear. So often I think, too, of all the fun we've had together, and I laugh aloud. I am sure that if I were to lose you even, I should always be able to laugh over the fun — for it has been part of our lives together, hasn't it? And I think, too, of all I have learnt from you. I have learnt everything I know from you. You have interpreted everything for me: nature, books, music, art, philosophy, and God in them all. I remember so distinctly one of the first stories you told me when I was quite a wee child: it was about a little old man who had been withered up ever since any one could remember, and all because he had lost a great treasure which he did not take the trouble to find again at once and without delay. And then it became too late. And he began to shrivel away into nothing. And you told me the name of the treasure: it was joy in all God's beautiful gifts. I don't think I ever forgot that until Theodore Bevan came into my life. Then I forgot it. But now I remember it again. And I have gone in search of the treasure.

"I know you do not believe that he has taken his life. But I think you don't quite understand that, in his way, he *was* attached to me, and was learning to love me. You see I read that in his journal. There could be no mistake about that. You ask me whether I fret for him, and I can honestly say that I do not *now*. At first I missed him terribly. But my wounded pride has helped me a great deal. Oh, it is such a relief to be able to speak freely to you about it all! We

must never, never have any more barriers. And now I want to say something about Brian Uppingham. I think of him too; but I feel too ashamed to send him even a message of greeting. I don't even know how I shall be able to face him when I return home. I know he loves me, of course. If things had gone differently with me, I was ready to love him and be loved by him. He is a man after my own heart. But he came into my life at the wrong time for me: he should have come earlier, father dear — or later; then I should not have treated him so unkindly — so shamefully. If he had come later, there would have been one thing less for me to regret in this miserable record of the last three years; and if he had come earlier, there would have been a different record for us all. And I should not have wounded my old father.

"I am writing this on what we call the 'honeysuckle verandah.' It is the hour of sunset, and the colours in the sky are unbelievably gorgeous, — that royal violet tint, and fiercest red, and glowing yellow. And now the barren mountains have put on their heliotrope garments, and seem to have suddenly become covered with pale purple heather. That makes one think of the dear old country. How I shall love to walk over the heather again! But I am not coming home until I have 'found myself.' When you see me, you will know that I have come home because all was well with me, and because I felt able to take up my old life again and make something better of it for you and me — and all of us. Your own NORA."

CHAPTER IV

GOOD NEWS

It was now nearly ten months since Nora accepted Mrs Ellerton's invitation, and went out to Lower California, where Mr Ellerton had bought a vast and desolate territory, which he, later on, abandoned with feelings of thankful relief.

In her absence, every one had wanted to take care of Mr Penhurst; and, between them all, it seemed probable that he would not have a moment's peace. At first he lived with Brian, but after a time he drifted back to his own home. He was not unhappy, but he was often very restless; and once it seemed as though he were going to have some kind of brain attack, for he harped so continuously on Theodore Bevan's supposed suicide.

"Little damned centipede," he would say, putting down his Sanskrit book. "It was just like him to go away, and leave my poor girl in the wrong."

"Don't always be thinking of him," Brian would answer. "He has passed out of our lives."

"But not out of our minds," answered the old man. "He will never pass out of our minds until we know for certain that he did not commit suicide. I would give up anything to know that. Yes, I would give up the joy of seeing my dear girl again, restored, as I feel sure she will be, to her own bright self."

Nurse Isabel came in one day and found him in one of these moods.

"Now, look here," she said, soothingly, "if you go on

like this much longer you will drive yourself mad, and then you will not be able to learn any more of that absurd Sanskrit. And you will also drive Mr Uppingham mad. He looks quite harassed, and as though he had not anything in the world to rely on, excepting his career, poor man! And he is not one of those self-contained people who can be satisfied with a career only. I think you are a nasty, selfish, ungrateful, unreasonable, and wicked monster. And I am ashamed of you. What is the use of reading all those stupid philosophers — look at them in the bookcase — if you cannot even practise a little amateur philosophy? Most people of average intelligence, when they have studied a subject for years and years, begin to have a vague idea of it, if nothing more. But you — oh, I'm ashamed of you! Why," she added, smiling, "I am more of a philosopher than you!"

He held out his hand to her.

"Thank you, my dear, for chiding me. I deserve it," he said, gently.

"You see," she said, "the poor historian cannot go on living perpetually on Bevan, Bevan, Bevan. He is becoming depressed, and I assure you, from my own personal experiences, that his depression is something quite unique. It will be infinitely worse than our discomfort caused by Theodore Bevan's supposed suicide. Take my advice, and do anything on earth to prevent Mr Uppingham from having an attack of despondency!"

Roger roused himself from his gloominess, and, with that simple-heartedness so characteristic of him, asked forgiveness of Brian.

"I've been a selfish old fellow," he said. "But Nurse Isabel has made me see the error of my ways, and now I am going to reform."

Brian was delighted with the sudden alteration, for he himself, in spite of all his quiet patience and persistence, was beginning to feel overborne. His work had been a strain on him for some time past; and of course he had been greatly wounded by the knowledge that Bevan had been trying to injure him in Nora's sight. Her treatment of him, her engagement to Theodore Bevan, her sadness and misery, and her final struggle for freedom, and now the consciousness of this great burden on her mind, had told on Brian. He had never once wavered in his firm belief that she was his. But he felt more and more the difficulty of reaching her. Scores of times he began letters to her, but he never sent any, — and he never sent messages. He did not neglect his work, nor his self-imposed duty of looking after Nora's father; and he interested himself in little Madge Carson, and tried to help her in his own kind way.

"When you get well again," he said, "we shall have to overwork you. I have at least ten books waiting to be bound by you — and you only."

She was recovering her health, and with it her courage, and she told him she owed both to Nora. That cheered him. One afternoon some proofs came of an important chapter on the "Rise and Fall of the Inquisition," and the historian, feeling that he wanted sympathy and advice, took them to Roger's home. Roger was out, and so he waited in the study. He had not been there ten minutes before Nurse Isabel called in, and found him looking disconsolate. They had met several times since Theodore Bevan's malice had been revealed to them; but in talking over the whole subject of Nora's infatuation, engagement, and escape, they had never once referred to that part of the story which affected them conjointly. But Nurse

Isabel had told him that the doctors had changed their minds about her moral character, and that in consequence she had plenty of work to do.

"So you see," she said, gaily, "my beautiful and inherent worth has triumphed over evil reports! Quite like a fairy-book, isn't it?"

But she knew what she owed to him, though her words were lightly chosen. And now they sat together, and she saw some printed pages in his hand.

"Something you've been writing?" she asked.

"Part of my new volume," he answered, indifferently.

"Aren't you glad that you are getting on so well with it?" she said.

"I don't know," he answered. "It is a lonely thing having a career and nothing else. I am not sure whether any success is worth having, unless there is some one with whom to share it."

"Then you feel alone, and as if no one cared?" she asked, kindly.

"Something like that," he answered.

"Poor fellow," she said. "You have had a hard time of it."

"Do you ever write to her?" Nurse Isabel asked, after a pause.

"No," he said, without looking up. "I don't see how I can write to her." Then he added: "I have written many letters to her and torn them up."

"And much good that has done!" answered Nurse Isabel. "Upon my word, I do think you are one of the densest people I ever met. I can't see where your intelligence comes in. I suppose you use it all up for your books. Anyway, let us hope it is somewhere — perhaps in this very volume — though I doubt it! Why, of course, you ought to write to her. It

is awfully unkind and hard-hearted of you to remain silent. Do you mean to say that all these months have gone by and you've not forgiven her yet?"

"Forgiven her?" he said. "Why, Nurse Isabel, what are you thinking of? There's no question of forgiveness between me and her."

"She behaved very badly to you," Nurse Isabel said, with assumed warmth.

"No one shall say one word against her," he said. "She was caught in a net and could not escape. That was all."

"And now that she has come to her senses, of course she is feeling miserable about you," said Nurse Isabel, without heeding him. "Any woman would. And she is not worse than any of us."

"Worse than any of you?" repeated Brian, excitedly.

Nurse Isabel put her hand to her mouth to conceal her smile.

"And the least you can do, is to write a few lines to cheer her up and reassure her," she persisted. "If you are not careful, some one will be getting in front of you again — perhaps a North American Indian this time — and you'll deserve it. You are so very slow, and so very dense. All the intellectual people I have ever met have been entirely without a gleam of intelligence, but you are the worst. However, as I said before, let us trust that they put it into their books — though I doubt it! If they do, of course that is another matter. For one can't eat one's cake and have it. Obviously your intelligence has gone somewhere. Don't you see for yourself that she will not know how to meet you unless she knows how to greet you? Don't you understand that she knows she has behaved abominably

to you, and that she is thinking all the time that she has wounded you, and alienated you for ever? Write to her at once and comfort her."

Then she paused a moment, and added gently:

"That is what I should be yearning for, if I were she."

"If I have not written to her, it is because I have felt so sure that she knew I was waiting for her," Brian said. "It never entered my head that she might think I had ceased to wait for her merely because she had wounded me. When one loves there is no question of forgiveness. And she is more dear to me now than three years ago when she came to see me at the Moat House. Then she came into my life as a spirit of hope; and she has remained with me as a spirit of fulfilment. Even if I am never to see her dear face again, nothing can change what she has done for me."

"You have a wonderful way of loving," Nurse Isabel said, as she poked the fire.

"I learnt it from my dear mother," he said. "She had the genius of loving."

"But genius is rare," she answered, "and most of us have not even any talents for it, though we may think we have. We soon find that they are worn out, and that nothing remains for us except the commonplace of forbearance or indifference or positive dislike. I wonder which stage I shall reach if I marry my agreeable sea-captain."

"But you do not seriously intend to marry him?" Brian asked.

"Why not?" she said. "I am very tired of nursing."

"Do you love him?" he asked.

Isabel laughed softly.

"Ah, that's another thing," she said.

"Have you ever loved?" he asked, with curious persistence.

She closed her eyes, and leaned back in the arm-chair.

"Yes," she said, gently. "But that belonged to the Past, if one can speak of a sacred thing as ever belonging to the Past. One ought rather to say that it permeates the Past, the Present, and the Future."

The tears coursed down her cheeks, and she did not try to hide them.

"Then he died," Brian said, sympathetically. "Poor Nurse Isabel."

"No," said Isabel. "It was not that. He loved some one else — very dearly."

"And he married her?"

"No," she answered.

"But he may yet turn to you," Brian said, kindly. "Don't throw yourself away on some one for whom you don't care. You are too good for that. Wait for the man you love. Put all the best of yourself into your love, and make it so strong and compelling that it will conquer in the end."

She had risen from the chair, and turned from him for a moment to pick up her veil, which had fallen to the ground.

"Ah, I could not have influenced him," she said. "Sometimes I have thought he was a little like you — only not so slow and dense — but then he was not intellectual — with a fixed idea in his heart and brain. He loved the woman of his heart much in the same way as you love Nora: it was part of his very life, his glory, his manhood. Nothing could have changed him, — neither time nor circumstance. And I knew it. But I knew also that my unspoken love could never harm him,

and that whatever happened to me in life, at least I had not missed that uplifting."

"I have always thought you had some beautiful bit of romance in your life, Nurse Isabel," Brian said.

"Most of us have something beautiful hidden away," she replied, "but we are ashamed to show it; perhaps because it is old-fashioned, out of date, or has a crack in it. But my treasure is at least flawless, for it is an Ideal."

"And now," she said, returning to her usual brightness, "I must be getting back to my patient. She is very trying, but I am thankful to say that she does not want to be read to out of geography books, and that she does like a little air occasionally. But she shares the very prevalent belief that trained nurses are trained never to sleep. Isn't it funny? Ah, here is Mr Penhurst at last! Now I shall learn whether he has been carrying out his promise to behave more like a philosopher."

But there was nothing of the quiet philosopher in Roger's manner when he saw Nurse Isabel and Brian. He threw his felt hat up to the ceiling and caught it, and seemed to be dancing around like any schoolboy. He was in the very abandonment of good spirits.

"Oh," he said, "I have such news, I have such news, I can scarcely tell it. I've seen him — the little Bevan — the centipede — I've seen him with my own eyes — sat with him in the same railway carriage — "

"Where? Where?" they asked, excitedly.

"On the Metropolitan," he said, sinking into his chair. "I got in at Gower Street, and found him there alone. He's quite alive — looks in excellent health — and sunburnt, as though he has been on a long voyage. And I said to him politely:

"'I perceive you have been on a long voyage, but not so long as you have led us to suppose.'

"Of course he made no answer, and he scurried out at Portland Road, leaving me in a state of exultation. For now that burden will be lifted from my dear girl's mind. I have a sort of feeling that I behaved like a madman for the rest of the journey. Anyway, people came to the carriage door, looked at me, and departed in hurried alarm."

"Are you quite sure that it was Theodore Bevan?" said Brian.

"My dear Uppingham," returned the old man, clasping hands with him, "there is only one centipede in the world, and I should know it anywhere!"

"I propose that we telegraph to Nora," said Nurse Isabel.

"Yes, yes," they cried, "we'll telegraph, and at once!"

And they all three set off together, and despatched this cablegram:

"Theodore seen in robust health in London by me. Cheer up. — ROGER."

Brian went home to write to her. As he took up his pen, he thought of Nurse Isabel.

"I always thought there was some romance in her life," he said aloud.

He smiled as he recalled her warning about the North American Indians. And he bent over his lover's task, and forgot Nurse Isabel. It was a long letter, and at the end of it he wrote:

"And so I pray that you will forget that I have ever been in your life. Then I can come once more into it, and take my chance as any stranger, not handicapped by time or circumstance. It is not every one with a heart

full of love who prays to be forgotten. And yet I pray thus, in order that I may have a clear running."

The old father went home, and touched the strings of his violoncello.

"Nora will come, Nora will come!" they seemed to be singing.

He went up to her bedroom and fingered her books and some of her work, which had never been moved. He opened her cupboard and touched two of her gowns hanging there.

"Ah," he said, tenderly, "she must have some new gowns — bright ones. I must consult Nurse Isabel, — something blue, I think."

Then he crept down to his study and took up a volume of Spenser.

"Ah," he said, sadly, "and now the other man will take her away."

And Nurse Isabel, making some gruel for her patient, dropped some salt tears into it.

"He will never know," she thought. "But I shall always love and bless him. No one can take that from me. It is my own. And now he is sitting writing to her. I can see the smile of tenderness on his face."

CHAPTER V

WEDDING GUESTS

It was two or three days before Mrs Mary Shaw's marriage with Mr William Parrington. Mr Parrington had broken his solemn promise to wait patiently until Nora Penhurst's return to England. There seemed to be some excuse for his perfidy, since he had been courting the obstinate hostess of the King's Head for about nine years.

"Either you marry me on the twenty-fifth of October, my birthday," he said, "or else we part, and you never see poor Parrington no more. Now, my dear, take your choice. Be careful how you choose. Remember, you'll miss me very much if you send me away for ever and evermore. 'Twill be a terrible thing for you."

"And for you also," said Mrs Shaw, pouting. "You'll miss me something shocking."

"Of course," replied Mr Parrington. "I shall be a lone miserable wretch, and die of a broken heart, or else of the bronchity. The doctor was only a-saying yesterday that my days was numbered. He sees a wonderful change in me — he do."

"Oh, Parrington, don't talk like that; it stirs me up dreadful," said Mrs Mary.

"Well, my dear, it be no fault of mine," he answered. "And you must take your choice and abide by it."

"I give in," said Mrs Mary. "I'll marry you without fail on October twenty-fifth, your birthday — I think you said it were your sixty-second birthday! You see it won't be for long, as you be so old and so ill! I give in, Parrington."

Parrington's eye twinkled.

"All right, my dear," he said. "I'm sure you've decided for your happiness. And I am sure 'twill be a comfort to you to think it be only for a short time!"

So this important matter was decided finally, and Mrs Mary Shaw wrote to ask Mr Penhurst and Mr Uppingham to the wedding.

"I shouldn't feel it legal-like without Mr Penhurst, bless him," she said. "He always promised he'd play the organ for me — the wedding-march by Mendelsomething or other. I'm not a-going to give that up, Parrington — not for no one."

"Right you are!" said Parrington. "But don't you dare to go a-sweethearting after Mr Uppingham, who always puts you in mind of that artist-chap with the light-brown moustache as never paid no bills. Nothing of that sort, Mrs Mary!"

"Right you are!" answered Mrs Mary Shaw, laughing; and the invitations were sent and accepted. Roger arrived in the best of spirits, and was followed on the next day by the historian, who also seemed to have cheered up wonderfully. Their minds had been relieved of a great burden when they learnt that Theodore Bevan had not committed suicide. Roger was very quaint about it; and, inspired by the certainty of Bevan's unimpaired health, wrote some doggerel lines called "The Centipede's Death." They ran as follows:

"There was a wily centipede whose name was little Bevan,
He did not like to live in hell, and couldn't live in heaven.
So he took up his abode on earth, and always lay in wait
To sting the wretched victims assign'd to him by fate.
He stung, he clung,
With all his might and main,
Injecting venom, diffusing pain.

But after many years of work the centipede fell ill;
No longer could he lie in wait to poison or to kill.
The last part of my story is the pleasantest to tell:
The centipede was driv'n from earth and forc'd to enter hell!"

He showed them proudly to Brian when the historian arrived at the King's Head.

"Ah," he said, with some of his old fun, "you didn't know I was a poet — did you?"

"We must send them to Nurse Isabel," Brian said, laughing. "Here, give them to me. I will copy them out."

"Oh, I like that," Roger said, gaily. "You want to pass them off as your own. I shall have a limited edition of one printed on vellum — poet's proof, in fact!"

They were still amusing themselves with this ambitious production when Mrs Mary Shaw came into the parlour to lay the cloth for supper.

"I do declare, it quite enlivens me to hear your cheery voices," she said, as she put a fresh log on the grate. "I've been that dumpsy to-day."

"Why, you ought to be in the best of spirits now that you've made up your mind to marry Parrington the day after to-morrow," said Roger.

"Oh, I'm not bothering about that," said Mrs Mary. "But the ancestors, poor creatures, be awful sour-tempered to-day, and great-uncle keep on saying: 'Mary Shaw, you be making a terrible mistake, and you'll live to find it out.' And Aunt Rebeccah nods her head and says: 'Ay, ay, Mary Shaw, you be making a terrible mistake, and you'll live to find it out, and you be aging wonderful quick.' 'Tisn't what you might call encouraging-like, on the eve of marriage, is it, Mr Uppingham, sir?"

"And what does Wullie say?" asked Roger.

"Oh, Wullie says: 'Don't be a goose, mother! Cheer up. Parrington be the best chap as ever was, and we'll all be mighty happy together, and I won't give no trouble till I be growed up!'"

"Hurrah for Wullie!" said Roger. "That boy will turn out trumps yet. I am much afraid that you will live to be disappointed in him, Mrs Mary. I am convinced that he will never consent to go on that downward path. You will have to bear your disappointment as bravely as possible."

"How you do make fun of me!" said Mrs Shaw, laughing. "But it quite braces me up. And to think you've both come down special to be present at my wedding. I take it very kind, Mr Penhurst, dear, and Mr Uppingham, sir. If only our dear Miss Nora was here too. 'Twould round everything off for me, and I'd be the happiest woman in the world. But, you see, Parrington wouldn't wait."

"Ah, if only she were here," the two men thought, as they looked dreamily into the fire.

CHAPTER VI

NATURE'S PROMISE

It was one of those radiant days in the late autumn, when summer returns as a welcome intruder and lends a golden lustre to all the beautiful colouring on the moors and in the lanes and by the winding river. The withered brown leaves smiled their answer to the sun's warm greeting. The reddened branches gleamed like fire. The reeds in the river, bowing to the gentle wind and murmuring soft words of welcome, were tipped with bright jewels of light. Away on the hill, at the back of the King's Head, the pines were illumined with floods of sunshine; the carpet of sombre cones and needles glistened in the tender embrace of the strong warm rays. There was a softness in the air, and a soothing fragrance of dampness — autumn's own especial charms. Summer and autumn were spending the day together, and Nature was well pleased to see her beloved children in harmony.

Roger and Brian, faithful comrades as ever, strolled out together, their steps leading them by instinct to Nora's favourite haunts. When they spoke, it was of her only.

"This is a day after her own heart," the old man said, as they sat near the weir and watched the rush of clear sweet water. "If she were here, she would say that there was a sort of mystic promise in the air: I feel it myself."

"And I feel it," Brian answered.

"She will come back soon," Roger said. "I am ex-

pecting at any moment to have a message to say that she has started homewards."

Brian made no answer. He was thinking of the words he had written to her:

"*Let me come as a stranger into your life.*"

They lingered for some time by the river, and then turned off in the direction of the moors, and came slowly back to the village. Just as they were nearing the King's Head, Mrs Mary Shaw hastened out to meet them. She was in a state of great excitement, but, from the radiant smile on her face, it was evident that she was not the bearer of ill-tidings.

"Something wonderful have happened!" she cried,— "I don't know how to tell you. Davy went to the station this morning, all unbeknown to any one, and brought back —"

The old man looked up and saw a dear, gallant figure approaching him.

He ran forward.

"My Nora, my own belovèd girl!" he cried.

"Oh, father," she cried, "my old sweetheart of a father!" And she held him in her strong young arms.

Brian stood apart, as one stunned.

She went up to him, and put out both her hands to him.

"*Not as a stranger!*" she said, and her voice thrilled through him.

He lifted her outstretched hands and pressed them reverently to his lips.

THE END

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